# CITY HILIGHTS

The Truth Speaks

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# FAREWELL DADA

# Maha bids adieu to Ajit Pawar

Lakhs of people, including political leaders, turned up at the Vidya Pratishthan ground in Baramati on Thursday to pay respects to 'Ajit dada' Pawar

**MUMBAI**

Amid chants of "Dada tumhala salaam", "Ajit Dada Amar Rahe", lakhs to people on Thursday bade a tearful adieu to Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister and NCP president Ajit Pawar, who died in a plane crash in his home town of Baramati in Pune district.

A sea of humanity poured into the streets of Baramati, a tehsil-town that Ajit Pawar nursed and developed, to pay their last respects, Pawar's sons, Parth and Jay, lit the funeral pyre.

The 66-year-old NCP chief, popularly known as 'Dada' (elder brother) in Baramati, was cremated with full state honours at the Vidya Pratishthan College ground, a day after he along with four others died when the chartered plane carrying them crashed on Wednesday. The college has been founded by the Pawar family.

Sharad Pawar, the patriarch and uncle of the departed deputy chief minister, sat quietly watching a legacy he helped build become a memory.

Thousands of mourners gathered for Ajit Pawar's last rites chanted "Ajit Dada amar rahe", when his mortal remains, draped in the national flag, were brought from his village Katewadi to the Vidya Pratishthan ground, located 100 km from Pune.

Ajit Pawar's cousin Supriya Sule, the NCP(SP) Lok Sabha member from Baramati, stood with his wife Sunetra Pawar, who is a Rajya Sabha member, to console her as she paid tributes to her late husband.

Announcements over loudspeakers urged people to maintain silence and discipline, and to pay their respects to the late leader from their seats, calling it the greatest tribute to Ajit Pawar, known for his strict sense of discipline.

Home Minister Amit Shah, BJP president Nitin Nabin, Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis, Union minister Ramdas Athawale, Goa CM Pramod Sawant, Maharashtra DyCM Eknath Shinde, AP minister Nara Lokesh were among the leaders who placed floral wreaths on Pawar's mortal remains.

### NCP leaders' 'courtesy meet' with Ajit Pawar's wife sparks succession buzz

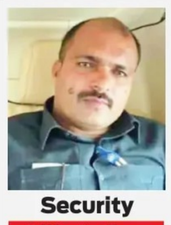
**PUNE:** Hours after the funeral of Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar on Thursday, a meeting in Baramati has fuelled talk that the NCP has begun planning its future strategy. NCP leaders Praful Patel, Chhagan Bhujbal and Dhananjay Munde met Ajit Pawar's wife, Sunetra Pawar. While sources said they urged her to take up the deputy chief minister's post, Bhujbal told agencies it was a courtesy meeting and no political discussion had taken place in the aftermath of Ajit Pawar's death in the plane crash on Wednesday.

**Captain Sumit Kapoor**

Amid quiet tears and folded hands, the mortal remains of Captain Sumit Kapoor were consigned to flames at the Punjabi Bagh crematorium in Delhi's Rajouri Garden on Thursday. With the body not taken to the Kapoor residence, family and friends gathered at the crematorium ground to pay their last respects.

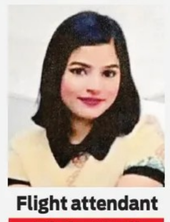
**Captain Shambhavi**

The funeral rituals of Shambhavi Pathak, the co-pilot, were held at Lodhi Road Crematorium in a solemn and emotional atmosphere. Family members, Indian Air Force officials, and local residents gathered to pay their final respects, remembering her professionalism, dedication, and service.



**Security Dilip Jadhav**

Vidip Dilip Jadhav, Ajit Pawar's security guard, was laid to rest on Wednesday night in his ancestral village in Satara. His nine-year-old son performed the last rites. Dilip was given a guard of honour as a final tribute. A large number of villagers attended the funeral.



**Flight attendant Pinky Mali**

Flight attendant Pinky Mali was cremated at Shivaji Park in Dadar of Thane on Thursday. A large number of people, including family and relatives, were present. Pinky's family originally hails from Jaunpur, Uttar Pradesh. Her father, Shivkumar, said her ashes will be taken to Banaras for immersion.

# 'India must run marathon and sprint simultaneously'

**NEW DELHI**

In a world of geopolitical turbulence, India must run a 'marathon and sprint' simultaneously, or run a marathon as if it were a sprint, the Economic Survey 2025-26 said on Thursday.

The pre-Budget document tabled in parliament further said that the global environment is being reshaped by geopolitical realignments that will influence investment, supply chains and growth prospects for years to come.

"Against today's global churn, India must choose to build resilience, innovate relentlessly, and stay the course toward Viksit Bharat, rather than seek quick fixes to visible, short-term pressures," it said.

The Survey said 2026 may mark the point at which policy credibility, predictability and administrative discipline cease to be mere virtues and instead become strategic assets in their own right, with lasting relevance.

"Put differently, India must run a marathon and sprint simultaneously, or run a marathon as if it were a sprint," the document said.

According to the Survey, the appropriate stance for 2026 is therefore one of strategic sobriety rather than defensive pessimism. "The external environment will require India to prioritise both domestic growth maximisation and shock absorption, with a greater emphasis on buffers, redundancy, and liquidity," it said

In a world of geopolitical turbulence, the Survey said, this may not be confined to a year but could be a more enduring feature. "In response, India needs to generate sufficient investor interest and export earnings in foreign currency to cover its rising import bill, as, regardless of the success of indigenisation efforts, rising imports will invariably accompany rising incomes," it said, adding that this has been the historical global experience.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

**GROWTH OUTLOOK**
The Economic Survey has pegged India's economic growth rate in the range of 6.8%-7.2% for the current financial year. The First Advance Estimates place FY26 real GDP growth at 7.4% and GVA growth at 7.3%, reaffirming India's status as the fastest-growing major economy for the fourth consecutive year.

**BANKING SECTOR HEALTH**
The survey noted that the health of India's banking system has been improving steadily, as the gross non-performing assets, as a percentage of total advances, for scheduled commercial banks came down to a multi-decade low of 2.2%.

**GST REFORMS**
The survey said that the recent Goods and Services Tax (GST) rationalisation is expected to support demand by lowering tax incidence and improving price competitiveness. The survey also highlighted the steps that the government should take to streamline the GST network.

**PRIMARY MARKETS**
On the financial markets, the survey said that India's primary markets in FY26 remained resilient and vibrant, leading the world in initial public offer (IPO) issuances.

**MERCHANDISE EXPORTS**
India's share of global merchandise exports has doubled from 1% to 1.8%; its share in global commercial services exports has rose from 2% to 4.3%.

**SERVICE EXPORTS**
India's services exports touched an all-time high of 387.5 billion, registering a robust 13.6% (YoY) growth and reinforcing India's position as a global hub for technology, business, and professional services.

**FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES**
The survey highlighted that India's foreign exchange reserves increased to $701.4 billion as of 16 January 2026, up from $668.3 billion as of the end of March 2025.

**MANUFACTURING**
Manufacturing GVA grew by 7.72% and 9.13% in Q1 and Q2, respectively, primarily driven by ongoing structural shifts within the sector.

**AI BOOM**
The survey cautioned against broader financial contagion if the AI boom fails to deliver the anticipated productivity gains, which may lead to a correction in overly optimistic asset valuations.

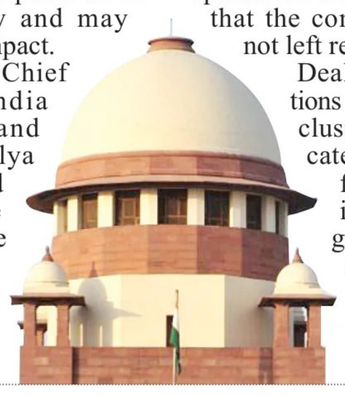
**RUPEE FALL:** The survey added that rupee valuation does not accurately reflect India's stellar economic fundamentals. The external environment remains uncertain; India needs to be cautious, but there is no reason for pessimism, the survey added.

# 'Capable of dividing society': SC puts on hold UGC regulations

**NEW DELHI**

The Supreme Court on Thursday put on hold the operation of the UGC's 2026 equity regulations, saying the new framework is capable of dividing society and may have a grave impact.

A bench of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi issued notice to the Centre and the UGC on pleas challenging validity of University Grants Commission (Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions) Regulations, 2026.



The court said that the 2012 regulations will continue to operate for the time being, so that the complainants are not left remediless.

Dealing with petitions questioning exclusion of 'general category' students from complaining under its grievance redressal mechanism, the bench asked, "In a country after 75 years, whatever we have gained in terms of developing a casteless society. Are we going regressive? What will happen?"

The court opined, if it does not intervene, it will lead to a dangerous impact, and that it will divide society and also have a grave impact.

# WE HAVE NEVER TAPPED PHONES OF GUV: HM

**BENGALURU**

Karnataka Home Minister G. Parameshwara on Thursday strongly denied allegations that the state government had tapped the phone of Governor Thawar Chand Gehlot, calling the claims baseless and politically motivated.

Responding to accusations by the BJP, Parameshwara said there was no question of the government engaging in phone tapping of the Governor's office. "We have not tapped the Governor's phone, nor is there any need to do so. The BJP is making allegations based on how they functioned when they were in power, assuming we operate the same way," he said while speaking to the media in Bengaluru.

He added that the BJP routinely levels accusations against the Congress-led government. "They make hundreds of allegations every day. What are we supposed to do? There is absolutely no connection between their claims and phone tapping," he remarked, reiterating that the government had never indulged in such practices and would not do so in the future.

## Palestine seeks India's mediation as Modi plans Israel visit

**NEW DELHI**

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to visit Israel next month, Palestine wants India to play a greater role in bringing peace in West Asia.

"I think India is placed to venture into a role that brings both sides together," Varsen Aghabekian Shahin, Minister of Foreign Affairs and expatriates of the Palestinian Authority, said in New Delhi on Thursday. "India is a friend of Israel, and it's a friend of the Palestinians. It is committed to international law. India can play the role of a mediator between Israel and Palestine," he said.

Shahin is in New Delhi to join the foreign ministers of the other member nations of the League of Arab States in a meeting with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Saturday. New Delhi is hosting the meeting 10 years after holding a similar conclave at Manama in 2016.

**STORIES-SCREENS-SOULS**

# *BIFFES 2026 opens in B'luru with global cinema showcase*

**BENGALURU**

Bengaluru rolled out the red carpet for the 17th edition of the Bangalore International Film Festival (BIFFES), which opened on Thursday with a grand ceremony held before the Vidhana Soudha. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah inaugurated the festival in the presence of actor and festival ambassador Prakash Raj and actor Rukmini Vasanth as special guests.

Curated around the theme "The World in Bengaluru," BIFFES 2026 celebrates cinema as a global cultural dialogue. The opening ceremony began with a World Music Symphony led by acclaimed violinist Dr Jyotsna Srikanth, featuring 35 musicians and reflecting the festival's international spirit. The inaugural screening followed at 8 pm with the Dutch film Port Baggage as the opening title.

Running from January 30 to February 6, the festival will showcase around 225 films from 65 countries, offering audiences a diverse spectrum of world cinema that explores social realities, cultural diversity, and evolving storytelling styles. Staying true to its socially conscious roots, BIFFES 2026 draws inspiration from a famous verse by national poet Dr GS Shivarudrappa, with a tagline that highlights women's sensibility and calls for equality.

This year's major sections include the Asian Cinema Competition, Chitra Bharati (Indian Cinema Competition), Kannada Cinema Competition, Contemporary World Cinema, Kannada Popular Cinema, Biopics, Country Focus, Indian Regional Language Films, and Retrospectives.

Special screenings will honour cinema legends and global masters, featuring landmark Kannada films starring Dr Rajkumar, Polish classics by Andrzej Wajda, notable works of Smita Patil, films by Thai filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul, award-winning international titles, and restored Indian classics.

Beyond screenings, BIFFES 2026 places strong emphasis on dialogue and learning.

QUICK READ

## K'taka Extends Special Nutritional Diet Plan to Five More Hospitals

**BENGALURU**

Karnataka's special nutritional diet plan for inpatients in government hospitals has been expanded to five more hospitals. The initiative, launched last year, provides meals tailored to patients' dietary needs. The new hospitals include General Hospitals in Yelahanka, KR Pura, and Nelamangala, Wenlock District Hospital in Mangaluru, and District Hospital in Dharwad. The program was initially piloted at KC General, Sir CV Raman, and Jayanagar General Hospitals in Bengaluru. ISKCON will continue supplying the nutritious meals, ensuring patients receive adequate support for recovery and overall health across the state's public healthcare facilities.

## Special Train to Run Between B'luru and Vijayapura for Shivaratri

**BENGALURU**

South Western Railway (SWR) will operate a special train service between Bengaluru and Vijayapura on the occasion of Shivaratri to manage increased passenger traffic. Train No. 06503, SMVT Bengaluru–Vijayapura Express, will depart SMVT Bengaluru at 7:15 PM on February 13, arriving in Vijayapura at 7:15 AM the next day. The return service, Train No. 06504 Vijayapura–SMVT Bengaluru Express, will leave Vijayapura at 5:30 PM on February 16 and reach SMVT Bengaluru at 6:30 AM the following day. Passengers are advised to book in advance to secure their seats.

## Rowdy Sheeter Naga Murder Case: All Accused Arrested

**BENGALURU**

All accused in the murder of rowdy sheeter Buddy Nagana at Balaji Farmhouse in Nagarur have been arrested, police said. Rowdy sheeters Umesh and Kiran surrendered at Hiriyur police station, hours after main accused Abhi and Chetan alias Chethu surrendered at Madanayakanahalli police station. Umesh and Kiran, both rowdy sheeters of Peenya police station, are wanted in several cases, including murder. They were taken into custody and handed over to Peenya and Madanayakanahalli police as per DCP orders. Chetan, Abhi, Umesh, Kiran and Pavan are currently in Madanayakanahalli police custody. They were interrogated by DCP D.L. Nagesh and ACP Ashok and later remanded to judicial custody.

# State Govt Extends Tenure of Corporation, Board Chairmen until Further Orders

Govt decision prolongs incumbents' terms, delaying expected changes in corporations and boards statewide

**BENGALURU**

The state government has issued an order extending the tenure of the current chairmen and presidents of various corporations and boards, allowing them to continue in office until further orders. The decision has come as a setback for several leaders who were hopeful of securing these positions after the completion of the earlier term.

According to the government order dated January 26, 2024, Members of the Legislative Assembly were appointed as presidents of 36 corporations and boards with the status of Cabinet Ministers for a period of two years or until further orders. As the two-year term has now formally ended, the government has decided to reappoint those MLAs who are currently heading 25 corporations and boards, with effect from January 26, 2026, granting them continuation with Cabinet rank until further notice.

The move has generated considerable political buzz, especially as Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar had earlier indicated that MLAs completing two years as chairmen of corporations and boards would be asked to vacate their posts to make way for others. Several aspirants had reportedly been assured that they would be accommodated once the initial term ended.

However, the latest order has effectively put those expectations on hold. Leaders who had been waiting in anticipation of appointments to

corporations and boards are said to be disappointed, as the continuation of existing chairmen has dashed their hopes. At the same time, those currently holding these posts have expressed relief, particularly because the order states that the extension will remain in force until further orders.

The development assumes significance amid ongoing discussions within political circles about a possible cabinet reshuffle and even leadership-related changes in the state. There is speculation that, in the event of a reshuffle, some of the corporation and board presidents could be inducted into the Cabinet, while their positions may later be allocated to new faces.

Another view doing the rounds is that the appointment of new presidents to corporations and boards may have been deliberately deferred until clarity emerges on the larger political questions facing the government. The extension order has thus raised fresh questions about the timing and intent behind the decision.

For now, the status quo continues, bringing relief to incumbents and disappointment to aspirants, while adding another layer of uncertainty to Karnataka's evolving political landscape.

## Bail not granted without reasons for arrest in drug cases: HC

**BENGALURU**

The Karnataka High Court has orally observed that accused persons arrested in criminal cases cannot seek release merely on the ground that the police did not state the reasons for arrest, particularly in serious offences such as drug trafficking. The court also directed the authorities to identify and immediately deport foreign nationals involved in drug cases whose passports have expired.

The observation was made by a Bench headed by Justice M. Nagaprasanna while hearing a petition filed by Yeboha Benedicta, a Ghanaian national, seeking to quash her arrest by the Yelahanka Suburban Police and the magistrate's order remanding her to judicial custody. She was arrested on charges of possessing and storing narcotic substances.

# 600 VTU Students Still Await Mandatory Internship Offers amid Portal Glitches

**BENGALURU**

Around 600 students of Visvesvaraya Technological University (VTU) are yet to receive approval for their mandatory seventh-semester internships, even as the application deadline ended on Wednesday evening. University officials said that except for these remaining cases, the vast majority of students had been successfully placed through the newly introduced common internship portal.

According to data shared by VTU, nearly 81,000 students registered on the portal for the mandatory internship programme. Of these, about 42,000 students secured free internships offered through the platform. In addition, around 8,000 students who independently found internships outside the portal—through professional networks and direct company contacts—had their offers approved by the university. However, by Wednesday evening, approvals for nearly 500 to 600 students were still pending, causing anxiety among those affected.

**Technical problems on the common portal have left hundreds of students struggling to secure mandatory internships.**

VTU authorities attributed part of the delay to technical issues and verification challenges on the portal. The university had made it compulsory for students to apply for internships through a centralised system in a bid to curb the submission of fake internship certificates, a problem reported in previous years. Officials also acknowledged receiving complaints that some companies listed on the portal demanded money from students despite advertising "free internships".

"We implemented this comprehensive internship portal to control fake certificates and unethical practices," said VTU Vice-Chancellor S. Vidyashankar. "If companies are found demanding money from students, strict disciplinary action will be taken against them."

To ensure the seriousness and quality of internships, VTU has decided to direct colleges to appoint lecturers and inspection squads to monitor students during the internship period. "We noticed that many students were only looking for online internships, applying selectively based on convenience. This raises concerns about commitment," the Vice-Chancellor said, adding that faculty members would regularly track student progress. The university has also mandated that students maintain a daily learning diary, recording what they learned each day during the internship. This, VTU believes, will reduce malpractice and ensure genuine engagement. A workshop on internship implementation was recently held at BMS College of Engineering to train internship coordinators from affiliated institutions. Former VTU Executive Committee member G. Rakesh cautioned that with the rise of artificial intelligence tools, coordinators must remain vigilant to prevent misuse in maintaining internship records. He urged coordinators to actively support students facing genuine difficulties.

Meanwhile, students remain worried. "When the university asked us to apply through the portal, many companies demanded money," said one student. "I secured an internship myself through LinkedIn, but it is still not approved. I am anxious about my future if this is not resolved soon."

## HC Seeks Explanation on Reservation to Local Bodies

**BENGALURU**

The Karnataka High Court directed the State government to explain its failure to issue reservation notifications required for conducting elections to urban local bodies and gram panchayats whose terms have either expired or are set to end this month.

A Division Bench comprising Chief Justice Vibhu Bakhru and Justice C.M. Poonacha issued the direction while hearing a public interest litigation filed by the State Election Commission (SEC). The petition sought directions to the government to notify reservation for upcoming local body elections, without which the election process cannot be initiated. The court adjourned the matter to February 5.

During the hearing, counsel for the SEC submitted that the term of almost all gram panchayats in the State would expire by the end of January. In addition, the tenure of 187 urban local bodies has already ended. These include 47 City Municipal Councils, 91 Town Municipal Councils and 49 Town Panchayats. He told the court that the SEC is bound by constitutional mandates and Supreme Court rulings to ensure that elections are conducted on time.

The counsel further pointed out that despite repeated representations and reminders, the government has not issued the mandatory reservation notification. "The Election Commission has consistently urged the State to notify reservations, but there has been no response. A formal notice has also been issued to the government, yet no action has been taken," he submitted, adding that this inaction compelled the SEC to approach the court.

General elections to gram panchayats in Karnataka were last held in 2020, and their five-year term is set to conclude by the end of this month. For fresh elections to be conducted for the next term, reservation for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes and women must be determined and notified by the State government.

While the responsibility of fixing reservation lies with the government, conducting elections falls under the purview of the State Election Commission. The SEC informed the court that election schedules cannot be announced until the reservation exercise is completed.

After hearing the submissions, the Bench directed the government to respond on the issue of reservation and posted the matter for further hearing on February 5.

# Government Gives Compassionate Job to Mahantesh Bilagi's Daughter

**BENGALURU**

The Karnataka government has issued a compassionate appointment to the family of senior IAS officer Mahantesh Bilagi, who died in a tragic road accident last year. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday formally handed over the government job appointment letter to Chaitanya M. Bilagi, daughter of the late officer, following a decision taken by the State Cabinet.

As per the government order, Chaitanya Bilagi has been appointed as an Assistant in the Secretariat under the Karnataka Civil Service Rules. She is expected to report for duty within the next 15 days, officials said. The appointment has been granted on compassionate grounds to support the bereaved family after the sudden demise of the senior bureaucrat while in service.

IAS officer Mahantesh Bilagi, along with three others, was killed in a car accident near Kalaburagi on November 25, 2025. The accident occurred near Gounalli Cross on the outskirts of Jewargi when the vehicle reportedly overturned after the driver lost control. While Bilagi succumbed to injuries at a private hospital in Kalaburagi, his relatives Shankar Bilagi and Iranna Bilagi died on the spot.

Announcing the appointment, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said the government stood firmly with the family in their hour of grief. Sharing

the development in a post on X, the Chief Minister said he had handed over the appointment letter to Chaitanya Bilagi on compassionate grounds and wished her success in discharging her duties with the same sense of social responsibility as her father.

"The untimely demise of a senior officer while in service is a great loss to the State. The government has extended this support as per rules to ensure the family's stability," the Chief Minister stated.

Ministers H.K. Patil, M.B. Patil and Shivanand Patil, Congress chief whip Ashok Pattan, and Chief Secretary Dr. Shalini Rajneesh were present on the occasion.

TOWARDS CLEANER CITY

# *GBA to Float Tenders for 46 Mechanical Sweepers on 10-Year Lease*

**BENGALURU**

The Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) has directed the city's five corporations to initiate the tendering process to rent 46 mechanical sweeping machines under its ambitious ₹613-crore road-cleaning initiative, with the rental period extended to 10 years. The move is aimed at addressing mounting concerns over dust pollution and silt accumulation across the city.

According to official orders issued by the GBA, the five civic bodies will soon call for tenders after examining a detailed feasibility study and cost estimates prepared by RITES Ltd. The study outlines technical specifications, operational requirements and indicative pricing for the machines. Corporation commissioners have been asked to seek government approval where necessary and proceed with the tender process.

Notably, the rental period for the sweeping machines has been extended from the originally proposed seven

years to 10 years. As a result, the five corporations together are expected to spend around ₹610 crore over the next decade to lease the 46 machines. Officials said the longer tenure was considered more viable from a cost and operations standpoint.

At present, Bengaluru does not have any operational mechanical sweeping machines, leaving roads littered with silt, dry leaves and construction debris. This has emerged as a major contributor to dust pollution, particularly along arterial roads and high-traffic corridors. The previous sweeping contract ended in early 2025 and was extended briefly, but only a limited number of machines were deployed, offering little relief.

The severity of the issue was recently highlighted by citizen-led silt removal drives in parts of the East zone. Tech professionals from the area reported collecting two tractor loads of silt from road stretches of less than 100 metres during just two such drives, underscoring the scale of neglect.

GBA Chief Commissioner Maheshwar Rao said the authority's priority was public health. "Dust and silt on roads directly affect citizens' health. We want to procure sweeping machines at the earliest. The RITES study was conducted as sought by the government, and we have shared it with the corporations," he said. Rao added that the civic bodies were not bound to strictly follow the study's model or pricing and could make changes as deemed necessary.

Officials noted that the proposed allocation of machines broadly reflects the length of arterial roads and traffic density across different zones, with the aim of improving efficiency and monitoring.

QUICK READ

## Police Personnel Get Occasional Leave on Birthdays, Anniversaries

**BENGALURU**

In a move aimed at improving work-life balance, the State Police Department has granted occasional leave to police personnel on their birthdays and wedding anniversaries. Director General of Police Dr M.A. Salim issued an order allowing officers and staff to take leave on these special occasions, recognising the demanding nature of police duty. The initiative is intended to help personnel rejuvenate emotionally and spend quality time with their families. The decision follows an official communication from the State Home Department requesting appropriate action on compulsory leave. Officials said the measure would boost morale and help police personnel maintain a healthy balance between professional responsibilities and personal life.

## Police Inspector Caught by Lokayukta Accepting □4 L Bribe

**BENGALURU**

A police inspector attached to the KP Agrahara police station was caught red-handed by Lokayukta officials while accepting a bribe of □4 lakh. The accused, Inspector Govindaraju, had allegedly demanded the money by threatening to falsely implicate a person in a chit fund-related case. Acting on a complaint, the Lokayukta laid a trap and caught the inspector while receiving the bribe near the CAR Ground close to Sirsi Circle. The operation was led by Lokayukta Superintendent of Police Shivaprakash. Inspector Govindaraju has been taken into custody and is being interrogated. Further investigation is under way.

## Khadi Clothing Made Mandatory for Govt Employees

**BENGALURU**

The State government has made it mandatory for government employees to wear Khadi clothes, following a decision taken by Chief Secretary Shalini Rajneesh. The decision was finalised during a meeting held on Thursday and will be formally launched on April 24. As per the directive, all government employees must wear Khadi attire on the first Saturday of every month. Male employees have been advised to wear Khadi pants, shirts and overcoats, while female employees may opt for Khadi silk sarees or chudidars. Employees have been instructed to purchase the attire from government-run Khadi Gramodyog stores. The Khadi Gramodyog Board has also been directed to offer an additional 5% discount over existing concessions.

# Rs 38,000 Crore Dues Unpaid: Contractors Announce Work Boycott and Protest

Contractors allege worsening corruption and delayed payments, threaten statewide agitation from March

**BENGALURU**

The State Contractors Association has announced a week-long work stoppage and a massive protest on March 5, alleging that the government has failed to clear long-pending dues amounting to nearly Rs 38,000 crore. Association president Manjunath said contractors across departments are facing severe financial distress due to delayed payments and administrative apathy.

Addressing a press conference in Chamarajpet, Manjunath said the Siddaramaiah-led government has completed two-and-a-half years in office, but contractors' problems remain unresolved despite repeated representations. "We have met the Chief Minister several times and submitted detailed memorandums. Even after providing 100 pages of information, there has been no concrete action," he said.

According to Manjunath, grants are being released only in limited departments such as the Public Works Department, Greater Bengaluru Authority and Panchayat Raj Department, while contractors working under other departments continue to suffer. He cited the recent suicide attempt by Munegowda, a contractor from Chikkaballapur, who allegedly took the extreme step after banks pressured him to repay Rs 25 lakh in outstanding loans.

He alleged that seniority norms are followed only in select departments, while elsewhere payments and approvals are arbitrary. In the Urban Development Department, he said package tenders have been floated in 10 metropolitan municipalities, pushing small and medium contractors out of the system. "The role of middlemen has increased sharply. Tender approvals and fund releases are more chaotic than during the previous government," he alleged.

Manjunath further claimed that in the Housing Department, contract-related work is being handled by a single section, leading to delays and lack of transparency. He alleged that middlemen have set up separate offices and openly threaten contractors, warning that tenders will be cancelled if their demands are not met. "If the Chief Minister does not immediately convene a meeting with contractors, we will release documents exposing these irregularities," he warned.

Honorary association president Jagannath echoed these concerns, particularly highlighting issues in the Kalyana Karnataka region. He alleged that contractors there are facing injustice due to interference by seven ministers. "There is far greater injustice in the tender process under this government compared to the previous one. Ministers themselves are cancelling tenders," he claimed.

The association reiterated its demand for immediate clearance of dues and systemic reforms, warning that the proposed protest and work boycott would intensify if the government fails to respond.

## Minister Byrathi Suresh Slams Contractors over Corruption Claims

**BENGALURU**

Urban Development Minister Byrathi Suresh on Thursday strongly rebutted allegations of corruption and "middlemen culture" made by the Karnataka State Contractors' Association (KSCA), urging the body to produce evidence rather than rely on unverified claims. Speaking to the media, Suresh said the tendering process is strictly governed by the Transparency Act, leaving no room for ministerial or official interference. "Whether a project is in Hebbal or Mysuru, it goes to the most qualified bidder based on the lowest bid, technical capacity, and machinery. If there is proof of corruption or middlemen, bring it forward instead of making habitual allegations," he stated.

Clarifying pending dues, Suresh noted that the Finance Department has been consulted regarding payments. "A significant portion of grievances relates to works commissioned during the previous BJP government under the AMRUT-1 scheme. There is a balance of roughly Rs 500 crore. The Finance Department has agreed to release Rs 200 to 300 crore immediately after the current assembly session. Payments will be made strictly according to seniority," he said. Responding to contractors' opposition to package tenders, which club multiple small projects into one large contract, Suresh defended the practice as an administrative necessity. "Floating 1,500 individual tenders for small works would be impractical. The costs of advertisement, processing, and supervision would be astronomical. Packaging by constituency or corporation ensures efficiency. Contracts are awarded to whoever meets the eligibility criteria," he explained, describing the association's protests as politically motivated or uninformed.

## Goripalya–Hosahalli Railway Bridge Opens After Two Years, Bringing Major Relief to Commuters

**BENGALURU**

After nearly two years of delays, technical hurdles, and public inconvenience, the long-pending Goripalya–Hosahalli railway bridge is finally ready, offering relief to thousands of commuters relying on this crucial west Bengaluru corridor. The railways undertook the project after the old structure was declared weak and beyond its usable lifespan.

A senior railway official said the tender for the project was floated in 2023 and is now complete. The original estimated cost was around Rs 6 crore, with an 18-month completion timeline. However, demolition uncovered unauthorised live electricity cables beneath the bridge, which carried power from Vijayanagar to Goripalya and lacked formal documentation. Laying nine new lines and obtaining approvals delayed construction by nearly eight months.

Venkat Reddy, contractor and founder of TrenZet Infra Limited, said demolition concluded in three weeks, after which construction of the bridge and approach roads progressed in phases. The project features nearly 200 metres of approach roads, concrete stretches on the Vijayanagar side, kerb work, and installation of 20 streetlights, all executed by the railways.

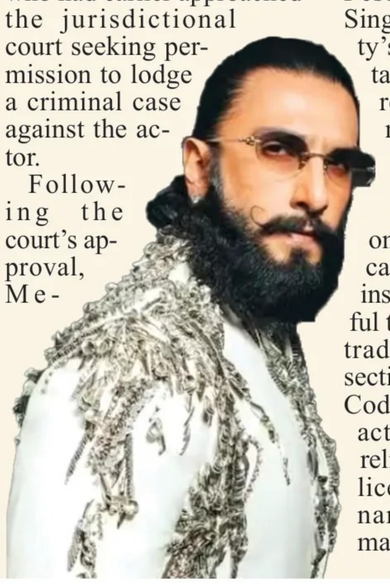
Due to additional work and prolonged delays, the overall project cost rose to about Rs 12 crore. During construction, residents of Goripalya, Hosahalli, and nearby areas faced severe disruptions. Commuters had to take long detours, worsening traffic congestion, and schoolchildren and working professionals were among the most affected.

With the bridge now operational, daily travel time has significantly reduced, and traffic flow along the previously congested corridor is expected to improve immediately, marking a major milestone for west Bengaluru commuters.

## FIR Registered Against *Ranveer Singh* for Mimicking Daiva Act from Kantara

**BENGALURU**

The city police registered an FIR against Bollywood actor Ranveer Singh for allegedly hurting religious sentiments by mimicking the Daiva act performed by Rishab Shetty in the film Kantara. The complaint was filed by city-based advocate Prashanth Methal, who had earlier approached the jurisdictional court seeking permission to lodge a criminal case against the actor.



Following the court's approval, Methal submitted a copy of the order to High Grounds police, prompting them to register the FIR. Singh had previously apologised for his act after facing widespread online backlash.

According to the complaint, the incident took place in November last year during the closing ceremony of the International Film Festival of India in Goa. Singh, while lauding Shetty's performance in Kantara Chapter 1, allegedly reenacted the film's climax sequence on stage, with Shetty present in the audience. The act reportedly triggered an online uproar, with many calling Singh's imitation insensitive and disrespectful to cultural and religious traditions. The FIR cites sections of the Indian Penal Code related to deliberate acts intended to outrage religious feelings. The police have begun preliminary inquiries into the matter.

## Kannada Activists Remove Tobacco Ads from Public Buses

**BENGALURU**

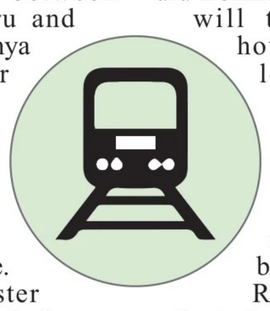
Kannada activists are intensifying their fight against tobacco advertisements on public transport buses. Groups from North Karnataka, which began targeting such ads, have now extended their campaign to Bengaluru, removing posters and stickers from BMTC, KSRTC, and Kalyana Karnataka Transport buses. At Majestic and KR Puram bus stands, activists tore down posters promoting gutka and other tobacco products. Organisations including Vimal, RMD, and Yuva Karnataka, led by Rupesh Rajanna, actively participated in the drive. Public commuters reportedly supported the pro-Kannada activists, applauding the removal efforts. The activists warned that if the posters were not removed immediately, they would stop buses and manually deface the advertisements with ink. The campaign has put pressure on the Transport Department, which reportedly earns around Rs 60 crore annually from advertisements on BMTC buses.

## B'luru-Mumbai Bi-Weekly Train Yet to Begin Operations

**BENGALURU**

Over a month has passed since the Railway Board approved a new bi-weekly train between Bengaluru and Mumbai, yet the service is still not operational. Despite the notification promising introduction "at the earliest convenient date," no progress has been made on the ground.

The long-awaited service was approved on December 9, 2025, responding to growing passenger demand for better connectivity between the two metro cities. The train is planned to run between SMVT Bengaluru and Mumbai's Lokmanya Tilak station. For over two decades, travellers relied on the Udyaan Express, which takes more than 20 hours to cover the 1,153-km route.



Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw had announced a superfast service in September last year, raising public expectations. However, the proposed SMVT Bengaluru-Lokmanya Tilak Express will take nearly 24 hours—four hours longer than the Udyaan Express—disappointing commuters who anticipated a faster daily service rather than a bi-weekly one.

Reports suggested the train might be shelved due to public criticism. Railway officials, however, clarified that introduction is pending timetable approvals between South Western and Central Railway zones. "Within our jurisdiction, the timetable is cleared, but Central Railway has yet to finalise theirs. Only then can commercial operations begin," a South Western Railway official said.

Sources also indicated that a Vande Bharat Sleeper Express on this route remains a strong possibility later this year, offering faster and more modern travel options for passengers.

## SC Dismisses BJP MLA Ramamurthy's Plea Seeking Stay on Election Trial

**BENGALURU**

The Supreme Court dismissed a petition filed by BJP MLA CK Ramamurthy seeking a stay on trial proceedings related to the Jayanagar assembly constituency election dispute. The bench of Justices Vikram Nath, Sandeep Mehta, and NV Anjaria rejected the plea, paving the way for the Karnataka High Court to continue hearing the election petition filed by Congress functionary Sowmya Reddy.

Ramamurthy had approached the apex court after the Karnataka High Court refused to stall proceedings on Sowmya Reddy's petition. With the Supreme Court rejecting the plea, the high court will now proceed with the hearing on the election petition without interruption.

This is not the first time the apex court has dismissed Ramamurthy's petitions in this matter. In March 2025, the Supreme Court rejected another petition challenging a high court order permitting a video clip to be admitted as evidence.

Ramamurthy had won the Jayanagar seat in the 2023 assembly elections by a razor-thin margin of just 16 votes, defeating incumbent Sowmya Reddy. The narrow victory sparked controversy, with allegations of irregularities and manipulation during the recount, particularly involving a crucial ballot.

TRUTH REVEALED

## *BDA Confirms 36 Burial Sites in Shivaram Karanth Layout*

**BENGALURU**

The Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) has admitted that 36 burial sites exist in Shivaram Karanth Layout, a U-turn from its earlier dismissal of social media claims suggesting residential plots were carved from graveyards. The revelation follows a review of land documents by senior BDA officials after viral photographs posted on X by netizen Sunil Reddy highlighted tombs scattered across Sector 1. Reddy's post, questioning whether these plots were being allocated for cremation purposes, drew widespread attention and public concern.

According to BDA records, the burial sites were on privately owned farmland where families had longstanding graves. Compensation was reportedly paid during acquisition, but questions now arise about how such land was approved for residential use in the first place. Internal discussions considered clearing the areas for housing development, but officials flagged the potential social and ethical issues. "We have received requests from some family members to return the land or adjust compensation. So far, only a limited number of claimants have approached us," said BDA official Manivannan. In a bid to avoid public backlash, the authority is now exploring converting the identified graveyard plots into public parks rather than selling them for residential purposes. The commissioner has instructed officials to formally notify the lands and examine their redesignation.

The decision has been welcomed by prospective buyers. "Samadhi land is not meant for living purposes," said Sandesh Shasthri, who had intended to buy a plot in the layout. "Selling such plots would have caused long-term distress for residents." BDA engineers noted that the controversy could have been averted by clearly fencing off burial areas to distinguish them from residential plots.

## QUICK READ

### Udupi health mission publishes selection lists online

**UDUPI**

The District Health and Family Welfare Officer's Office has released the provisional selection and reservation lists for various contract posts under the National Health Mission and local clinics. Candidates can view the lists on the website ujuthi.t.i.t, which are prepared on a roster and merit basis. Those who have any objections or discrepancies are requested to submit them to the District Project Management Unit at the Health and Family Welfare Officer's Office in Udupi. The last date for submitting objections is 4 pm on February 2, according to an official statement from the office.

### Udupi invites applications for nurse position

**UDUPI**

The Karnataka State AIDS Prevention Society has invited applications for the post of Nurse-1 on a contract basis at the ART Center of Kundapur Public Hospital. Eligible candidates must have B. Sc Nursing or GNM qualifications, be registered with the State Nursing Council, have computer knowledge, and experience working with key populations and affected communities. Interested candidates should submit the completed application form along with required documents to the District AIDS Prevention and Control Unit, Ajjarkadu, Udupi by February 6 during office hours. For details, visit the website zthiujuthi.nchidtch-inchinchi.gov.it, according to the District AIDS Control Officer.

### Children invited to apply for Balgaurava Award

**UDUPI**

The Karnataka Bala Vikas Academy, Dharwad, has invited applications for the "Balgaurava Award" from children under 18 who have achieved excellence at state, national, or international levels. The award recognizes outstanding performance in sports, music, dance, acting, painting, science, research, or versatile talents. Interested children must submit their application along with self-attested documents and personal details to the Project Officer, Karnataka Bala Vikas Academy, Lakmanahalli, Dharwad-580004 by February 20. For forms and more information, candidates can contact the Deputy Director, Women and Child Development Department, Udupi, at 0836-2465490, according to an official release.

# Savita community seeks law against caste abuse

Hadapada submitted a petition with community demands, including shelters, salon chairs, temple funds, renaming a circle, and requested a meeting

**GADAG**

A strong demand for a special law to stop caste-based insults against the Savita community was raised during Savita Maharshi Jayanti celebrations in Gadag. Krishna H. Hadapada, District President of Gadag District Savita Samaj, urged the government to act quickly and bring legal protection against the misuse of abusive words targeting the community.

Speaking at the programme organised jointly by the district administration, the Kannada and Culture Department, and the Savita Samaj, he said no one chooses their caste at birth and discrimination based on traditional occupations must end. He stressed that a law does not need large funds, only the will to ensure justice and equality. He welcomed the assurance of Minister Shivaraj Thangadgi that the issue would be discussed with the Chief Minister.

Hadapada also submitted a petition listing community demands. These included setting up shelter homes for poor families, providing 200 free salon chairs to support livelihoods, releasing funds for a temple at Gangimadi, and naming a circle after Sant Sena Maharaja. Leaders requested a meeting with Law Minister H.K. Patil to press for a legal framework against verbal abuse.

MLA Krishnagouda Patil said efforts would be made step by step to meet the demands and promised to arrange discussions in Bengaluru. District Magistrate C.N. Sridhar said he would review the requests and support lawful measures to protect dignity and equality.

Community leaders called for unity, education, and social progress, saying respect and equal rights are essential for a just society. Hundreds of members and leaders attended and expressed hope for early government action.

# Insight Fest 2026 celebrates brilliant young talent

**Chief guest H.K. Patil emphasized discipline in student life, praising rural students' progress, while Srilakshmi Bhat encouraged achieving success regardless of age with confidence and determination.**

**GADAG**

The annual Insight Fest – 2026 of Insight Academy and Mylarappa Menasagi Pre-University College was celebrated with colour and excitement at Pandit Shri Bhimsen Joshi Theatre in Gadag. The event was organised under the Adiyogi Educational Trust and brought together students, teachers, parents, and guests for a day of inspiration and culture.

Former ISRO Chairman A.S. Kiran Kumar inaugurated the fest and told students that success does not come easily. He said steady effort, deep interest, and patience are the real keys to achievement. India, he noted, is moving ahead in science and technology, surprising the world with its progress. He encouraged youngsters to dream big and work hard to go beyond limits and build a strong future.

Chief guest H.K. Patil spoke about the value of discipline in student life. He said it was heartening to see rural students entering mainstream education and urged them to shape a better tomorrow through dedication. International Young Director Award winner Srilakshmi Bhat told students that age is never a barrier to success. With confidence and determination, she said, anyone can achieve great things and even create history.

Trust president Shrikant Gowda Patil, secretaries Pawan Kumar Seth and Kumar Rathod, treasurers and other dignitaries were present on the stage. Dr. Jayadeva Menasagi, Executive Chairman of M.M.M. Trust, Administrator N.M. Mulla and B.M. Nadeem Mulla also attended. A special highlight was that First PUC students neatly conducted the entire programme. Colourful cultural performances by students entertained the audience and added joy to the celebration. Organisers said such events build confidence, teamwork, and creativity among students and prepare them for future challenges in life.

*During the meeting, Nawaz urged immediate Ulaibettu-Sankamad bus service; KSRTC officer assured prompt implementation*

# Mangalore reviews taluk level guarantee scheme progress

**MANGALORE**

A review meeting of the Mangaluru Taluk Level Guarantee Scheme Implementation Committee was held at the Taluk Panchayat Hall under the chairmanship of Surendra Kambali on Thursday.

Child Development Scheme Officer Shwetha announced that the subsidy for October 2025 under the Grihalakshmi Scheme has been released and will soon be deposited into the beneficiaries' accounts. She urged all beneficiaries to check their accounts and ensure proper receipt of funds.

During the meeting, a new KSRTC bus sanctioned for the Ulaibettu-Sankamad route was discussed. Committee member Nawaz requested that the bus service be started immediately, and the KSRTC officer responded positively, promising timely implementation. Taluk Panchayat Executive Officer Mahesh Kumar Holla, District Guarantee Scheme Implementation Committee Member Alston D. Cunha, Taluk Guarantee Scheme Committee members Prashant S, Nawaz, Shaila Neeta D'Souza, Rajesh Shetty, Ritesh Anchan, Vidya, Sridhar Panja, D.M. Mustapa, along with departmental officers, Taluk Panchayat Planning Officer Sukanya, Content Manager Aries, and Taluk IEC Coordinator Nishmita B, attended the meeting.

The committee reviewed the progress of ongoing schemes, ensured coordination among departments, and highlighted the importance of timely delivery of benefits. Officials encouraged continued monitoring to ensure the effective implementation of the Taluk Level Guarantee Scheme across Mangaluru.

## Kasaragod's Umar Mukhtar wins national Qiraat title

**MANGALORE**

Umar Mukhtar from Kasaragod, Kerala, won first place in the national-level Qiraat competition held at Indiana Convention Hall, Mangalore, on Wednesday. The event was organized as part of the tenth anniversary celebrations of the Dr. Abdul Shakeel Charitable Trust to promote the recitation of the Holy Quran among youth. Over 2,250 participants submitted their Qiraat videos online for the competition. After a technical review by renowned scholars, 50 finalists—40 boys and 10 girls—from states including Karnataka, Kerala, Goa, Telangana, and Uttar Pradesh competed in the final round. Judges Sheikh Sarfaraz Azhari (U.P.) and Qari Ahmed Munir (Hyderabad) selected the winners. Abdul Shakeel, organizer of the event, said the competition aimed to guide youth away from drugs and crime while encouraging spiritual education.

# Koppal to host festival celebrating five guarantees

**KOPPAL**

A district-level festival highlighting the state government's five guarantee schemes will be held in Koppal in February, said Reddy Srinivas, Chairman of the District Guarantee Schemes Implementation Authority.

He spoke during a progress review meeting at J.H. Patel Hall in the Zilla Panchayat office on Thursday. The festival is planned at Madhusree Garden on Hospet Road in Koppal city, where beneficiaries of various schemes will be honoured.

Srinivas said people who have benefited from the Grihalakshmi, Grihaljyothi, Shakti, Annabhagya, and Yuvanidhi schemes should be invited in large numbers. Officials from departments linked to these schemes were told to make proper arrangements to ensure the event runs smoothly. He stressed that committee chairpersons and members from all taluks must take responsibility and work together to make the festival successful. The schemes, he said, are helping poor and middle-class families improve their financial stability. The event will also provide clear information about eligibility, benefits, application steps, and the present status of each scheme.

Zilla Panchayat Chief Executive Officer Varnit Negi said beneficiaries under Yuvanidhi should be given skill training through the Yuvanidhi Plus programme to improve their job opportunities. He clarified that attending this training will not affect their unemployment allowance.

Vice President Manjunath G. Gondabala suggested setting up five help stalls at the venue with laptops and staff to guide people. Food department officials were asked to spread awareness about Annabhagya benefits, especially among senior citizens.

Officials from different departments shared updates on the district's progress under all five guarantee schemes during the meeting.

# Labour codes slammed as threat to workers

**MANGALURU**

Senior trade union leader Meenakshi Sundaram has strongly criticized the four new labour codes brought by the central government, calling them a serious threat to the rights and safety of workers. She warned that these laws could push the working class into deeper insecurity and hardship.

She spoke at a public meeting held at Hampankatta on Thursday, marking the conclusion of a four-day awareness padayatra organized across Dakshina Kannada district. The march aimed to inform workers and the public about the possible impact of the new labour laws. According to her, the labour codes mainly benefit large corporate companies while weakening long-standing worker protections. She alleged that the changes make it easier for employers to hire and fire workers and reduce the power of trade unions. She also accused both major political parties of supporting policies that harm labourers.

Meenakshi Sundaram further said that other proposed laws related to agriculture and electricity are also putting pressure on farmers and rural families. She expressed concern that reducing central support for employment guarantee schemes would badly affect poor households who depend on wage work.

CITU district president B.M. Bhatt said the new labour policies would increase inequality and create fear among workers. District general secretary Sunil Kumar Bajal introduced the event. Several local leaders and activists were present on the stage.

## Seven Years of Service Honored in Rajura Panchayat

**KUKANUR :** A farewell program was organized for the Rajura Gram Panchayat members who successfully completed their five-year tenure, as staff and development officers honored their dedicated service under Kukanur taluk. Speaking at the event, Panchayat Development Officer expressed pride in working with compassionate and cooperative members. He said the Panchayat's success, including winning the Gandhi Gram Puraskar in 2024-25, was a testament to their united administration. "This award is not only for the Panchayat but also a matter of pride for all villagers," he added. Member Basavaraj Reddy shared his experience, saying that when they began their term at a young age, they had many dreams of village development. "We tried to implement as much work as possible with the support of MLAs and officers while understanding the real needs of the villagers," he said. Senior member Bheemareddy Madanur also expressed his pride in leading the Panchayat with a committed team. He emphasized that the smooth functioning of the Panchayat was possible only because of the cooperative spirit of all members.

**VOLUNTEERS EMPOWER JUSTICE**

# *Legal volunteers trained to spread justice awareness*

**GADAG**

A two-day training workshop for Array Law Volunteers was held at the ADR building in the District Court complex of Gadag. The programme was organised jointly by the Karnataka State Legal Services Authority, Bengaluru, the District Legal Services Authority, Gadag, the District Bar Association, and DEEDSA, Mangaluru.

Principal District and Sessions Judge Smt. Nagaveni, who is also Chairperson of the District Legal Services Authority, said legal awareness is important for every citizen. She noted that more than 240 volunteers have been appointed across the district to help people understand their rights and duties.

She said the volunteers are ready to work for society and will go door to door to listen to public problems within the legal framework. Such efforts, she added, can help solve disputes, support families in distress, and even bring school dropouts back into education.

Vice President of the District Bar Association M.A. Sankanal said legal knowledge is essential for self-protection and responsible citizenship. He explained that workshops like this guide volunteers to serve people better and strengthen faith in the justice system.

Women volunteers Rupa and Nirmala began the event with a prayer song. A.S. Makanadhar welcomed the gathering, and Fakkiramma Lakkundi compered the programme. Senior advocate G.C. Reshmi, DEEDSA project coordinator Tukaram Ekkaru, Chief Legal Aid Officer S.V. Grama Purohita, and Assistant Legal Aid Officer Gururaj B. Gowri were present. The organisers said the main aim is to ensure that even the most marginalised people receive timely legal help. By spreading awareness at the grassroots level, volunteers can reduce conflicts and guide citizens towards peaceful solutions. Officials thanked participants for their active involvement throughout.

# Mega job fair offers thousands of opportunities

**CHITRADURGA**

A large district-level job fair will be held on February 1 at the Government Arts College grounds in Chitradurga, with more than 100 companies taking part. Zilla Panchayat Chief Executive Officer Dr. Akash has directed that all beneficiaries receiving unemployment allowance under the Yuvanidhi scheme must register and attend the fair. He gave these instructions during a preparation meeting held at the Zilla Panchayat mini hall on Thursday.

The job fair is being organised jointly by the district administration, Zilla Panchayat, and the Skill Development and Livelihood Department to help unemployed youth find work.

Around 1,800 candidates have already registered online, and officials expect nearly 7,500 job seekers to attend. Companies from fields such as IT, biotechnology, mechanical, and automobile sectors will participate. Well-known IT companies are also offering opportunities for engineering graduates. Candidates with SSLC, PUC, ITI, Diploma, B.E., and other qualifications can attend. Each applicant must bring five to six copies of their resume along with required documents.

**About 1,800 candidates registered, nearly 7,500 expected. IT, biotech, mechanical, automobile companies, including top IT firms, seek candidates with SSLC, PUC, ITI, Diploma, B.E., resumes, and documents.**

Dr. Akash said over 5,000 Yuvanidhi beneficiaries and many technically trained youth should not miss this chance. Officers have been told to personally inform eligible candidates and ensure their participation.

Companies from nearby districts like Tumakuru, Shivamogga, Ballari, and Davangere have also been invited. Special counters will guide candidates to suitable employers, and separate rooms will be arranged for interviews.

To spread awareness, officials are promoting online registration through QR codes, local announcements, and educational institutions. Clear guidance desks will be set up at the venue to help candidates move smoothly through the process.

# JDS urges Dalit leaders to quit Cong

## Murthy claimed Congress sidelines long-time local and Dalit leaders, fostering divides and treating Dalits merely as a vote bank

**RAMANAGARA**

State JDS media spokesperson V. Narasimha Murthy on Thursday called upon "self-respecting" Dalit leaders to leave the Congress and join the Janata Dal (Secular), alleging neglect within the ruling party. He spoke at a press conference at the JDS office in Ramanagara.

Murthy claimed that a divide between "native" and "migrant" groups has grown inside the Congress and that long-time local leaders are being sidelined.

He said many Dalit leaders who worked for the party for decades now feel ignored and disappointed. According to him, the Congress government has failed to deliver development and has treated Dalits only as a vote bank.

He cited the example of a local Congress leader from Magadi who recently resigned, saying such exits show rising dissatisfaction. Murthy urged Dalit leaders across the State, especially in Ramanagara, to join the JDS where, he said, they would receive respect and recognition.

He also accused the State government of misusing funds meant for Dalit welfare under special schemes and delaying payments. JDS leader Kottipur Govindaraju added that welfare schemes are not reaching people properly and that atrocities against Dalits have not reduced.

In a separate remark, Murthy criticised Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar over statements about naming institutions after Mahatma Gandhi. He challenged Congress leaders to first rename schemes and projects named after members of the Nehru-Gandhi family if they truly wish to honour Mahatma Gandhi. Several local JDS leaders were present at the press meet.

### JDS URGES DALITS TO QUIT CONGRESS

Janata Dal (Secular) State media spokesperson V. Narasimha Murthy on Thursday appealed to "self-respecting" Dalit leaders to leave the Congress, alleging neglect and internal divisions within the ruling party. Speaking at a press conference in Ramanagara, he claimed long-time local Dalit leaders are being sidelined as a divide between "native" and "migrant" groups widens. Murthy accused the Congress government of treating Dalits as a vote bank, misusing welfare funds, and delaying payments. JDS leader Kottipur Govindaraju echoed concerns over poor scheme implementation and continued atrocities.

# Employees urged to protect health through sports

**CHITRADURGA**

Safai Karmachari Commission President P. Raghu advised government employees to give priority to health even while handling heavy workloads. He spoke after inaugurating the district-level Karnataka State Government Employees Sports Meet and Cultural Competition at Obavva Stadium on Thursday. He said employees play a key role in taking government schemes to common people. Because of long hours and stress, many workers now face problems like high blood pressure and diabetes at a young age. Regular sports and cultural activities, he said, help improve both mental and physical health. District Level Guarantee Scheme Implementation Committee Chairman R. Shivanna said a healthy body supports a strong mind. He urged staff to take part in games with team spirit and also maintain honesty and transparency in public service. He noted that welfare measures like Arogya Sanjeevini and salary revisions have strengthened employee security.Zilla Panchayat Chief Executive Officer Dr. S. Akash said workers should not remain limited to office duties. Walking, yoga, and meditation should become daily habits to reduce stress.

# Senior Police officer urges strict child protection measures

**CHIKKABALLAPUR**

Senior Child Police Welfare Officer R. Prakash inaugurated a one-day training workshop on child protection laws and policies for supervisors and heads of all educational and non-educational hostels in the district on Thursday.

The event was held at Sir M. Visvesvaraya Hall, Zilla Panchayat, and organized jointly by the Child Protection Directorate, Bengaluru, District Administration, Zilla Panchayat, District Legal Services Authority, Women and Child Development Department, and District Child Protection Unit. Prakash urged hostel officials to take strict measures to ensure the safety of children and emphasized the need for joint responsibility between hostel officers and child protection authorities.


**Govt of Karnataka**
**EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, PWD DIVISION, SEDAM**
No: EE/PWD/Dvn/Sed/TS-1/2025-26/2895 Dated: 27.01.2026
**SHORT TERM TENDER NOTIFICATION**
1) Details of Works: 1. Total no of work 01 in Kalagi Taluka Indent No : 32445, 2) Head of Account : Under CMIDP work for the year 2025-26. 3) Amount put to tender : Lowest Estimate cost : **Rs.400.00 Lakhs,** Highest Estimate Cost **Rs.400.00 Lakhs,** 4) Eligibility of Contractor : Class-I Contractor and above, 5) Pre Bid Meeting Date : **09.02.2026, Morning 11.30 Hrs**, 6) Date and time for tender Queries of tenders : **10.02.2026 - 17.30 Hrs**, 7) Tender form fee & EMD Amount : Tender Processing fee & EMD As per e-portal, 8) Last date & time for receipt of tenders : **11.02.2026 - 16:00:00 Hrs,** 9) Date & time for Opening of Technical Bid : **12.02.2026 -16:30:00 Hrs**, 10) Date and time for Opening of Financial Bid : **16.02.2026 16:30:00 Hrs**, 11) Communication Address : Office of the Executive Engineer PWD Division, Sedam. 12) Internet Address : **www.kppp.karnataka.gov.in,** 13) If any changes for Cancelation : Any Changes and cancelations are done in **www.kppp.karnataka.gov.in**
**NOTE** : 1) The Undersigned has to power to Postponement/ rejecting the tenders, 2) If any changes are there in upcoming days these tenders are not published in tender bulletin it should be read in **https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in** portal.
DIPR/Kalaburagi/1029/2025-26/Deshpande Publicity
Sd/- **Executive Engineer**
PWD Divison, Sedam



**PUBLIC NOTICE**
Notice is hereby given to public at large **Mr.B Govinda Reddy S/O Ramreddy,** Residing at #159, Gangondanahalli,Lakshmipura Post, Bangalore North, Karnataka - 562162. He has lost the Registered Original Sale Deed of Doc No. DSP-1-07130-2008-09 dated on 16-03-2009 he has lost at Near Gangondanahalli bus stop Accordingly he has lodged the complainant on Bangalore City Police with E-Lost dated 28/01/2026 Report No.2032107/2026 for **SCHEDULE PROPERTY :** All that piece and parcel of the Property bearing Site No.157 Southern Portion, Assessment No.84/2 and 84/3, PID No.8376237791. Serial No. 2815, Katha No.23. Situated at Gangondanahalli Village, Dasanapura Hobli, Bangalore North Taluk, Measuring East to West : 40 feet and North to South 15 feet, in all measuring 600 Sq,ft bounded on **East by:** Road, **West by:** Site No.166, **North by:** Same Site No.157 balance Northern Portion , **South by:** Property No. 156. If anyone finding the aforesaid document is hereby requested to handover the same to our office at the address mentioned hereunder.
**HARISHA .S, Advocate**
**# 1479. DRLS PLAZA.**
**UNION BANK BUILDING. T DASARAHALLI, Bengaluru-560057. Mob No. 9060950265.**



**PUBLIC NOTICE**
Notice is hereby given to public at large **Mr.Dilli Prasad S/O B Govinda Reddy,** Residing at #159, Gangondanahalli,Lakshmipura Post, Bangalore North, Karnataka - 562162. He has lost the Registered Original Sale Deed of Doc No.MDL-1-00585-2019-20 dated on 10-05-2019 he has lost at Near Gangondanahalli bus stop Accordingly he has lodged the complainant on Bangalore City Police with E-Lost dated 28/01/2026 Report No.2032089/2026 for **SCHEDULE PROPERTY** : All that piece and parcel of the Property bearing Site No.158 Southern Portion, Assessment No.84/2 and 84/3, Katha No.84/2. Situated at Gangondanahalli Village, Dasanapura Hobli, Bangalore North Taluk, Measuring East to West : 40 feet and North to South 15 feet, in all measuring 600 Sq,ft bounded on **East by:** Road, **West by:** Site No.165, **North by:** Same Site No.158 balance Northern Portion, **South by:** Site No. 157. If anyone finding the aforesaid document is hereby requested to handover the same to our office at the address mentioned hereunder.
**HARISHA .S, Advocate**
**# 1479. DRLS PLAZA.**
**UNION BANK BUILDING. T DASARAHALLI, Bengaluru-560057. Mob No. 9060950265.**



**CHANGE OF NAME**
I, AMRUTHA P N W/o SHIVA KUMAR SWAMY C B, R/o No 32, 2nd Main, 2ndCross, Near Lord Bramha Temple, Brundavana Nagar, Karihobanahalli, Nagasandra, Bangalore North, Bengaluru, Karnataka-560073, have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as PAVITHRA C.



**CHANGE OF NAME**
I, RAGHU VENKATESH NAYAKA S/o VENKATESH NAIKA, R/o No 12, Mangalagowri Nilaya, 2nd cross, Jai Maruthi Layout, Near Gajanana Engineering Works, Tarabanahalli, Bengaluru, Karnataka-560090, have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as RAGHU V.



**PUBLICE NOTICE**
Public are hereby informed that, my client Somashekar S/o. Late Chikka Lakshmaiah, aged about 40 years, residing at # 86, Mariyappa Lay-out, 'A' Block, Narasapur Village & Post, Narasapur Hobli, Kolar Taluk, Kolar District, Karnataka State, PIN - 563 133, Mob. 9986487225, as purchased the Schedule Property. Hereunder and referred as schedule property from our previous vendor and willing to mortgage the schedule property to TATA Capital Housing Finance Limited Ltd.
Notice is hereby given to the legal heirs of Smt.Sarojamma and General Public that if any persons, entity, company firm, institution has or claims any right, title, interest, pending litigation, tenancy, mortgage, charge, Lien or demand or any other interest of whatsoever nature in or upon the schedule property any part thereof the same may be brought to the notice of the undersigned in writing together with all details and documents in support of such claim within 07 (seven) days from the date of this notice. Failing which it shall be deemed that the aforesaid owners has a clear and marketable title to the schedule property and that none else as any right, title, interest or claim whatsoever in respect of schedule property and my client would be at liberty to proceed to purchase the schedule property. Any claims received after the expiry of the period mentioned above shall neither be entertained nor be binding on my client.
**SCHEDULE PROPERTY**
All the peace and parcel of E-Swathu Katha No. 151900701900100331, measuring East-West 6.707 meters, North-South 6.097 meters, total measuring 40.892000 Sq. Meters and another property E-Swathu No. 151900701900120737, measuring East-West 6.707 meters, North-South 4.573 meters, total measuring 30.67 Sq. Meters, it is commonly bounded on East-by House of Lakshminarayana Guptha, West by Property of Prabhakar, North by Road, South by Vacant Space, Now Prabhakar Property. The above said schedule property purchased by the one Somashekar from one Sarojamma D/o. Muniyamma, W/o. Gangappa and Varalakshmi W/o. Srinivas on 15/06/2023 vide document No. KLR-1-01741/2023-24, the said Sarojamma purchased above said schedule property from one Muniyamma D/o. Muni Nagappa on 21/07/2007 vide document No. Book-1, Reg. No. KLR-1-01695/2007-08, CD No. KLRD-33.
Sri Sathishkumar. A, Advocate,
Office Address : Basavaraj Building, Beside Madhusudhana Bus Guarage, Gulpet Main Road, Kolar - 563 101,
Mob. 9731040689



**PUBLIC NOTICE**
**I, Smt. Lakshmi, wife of Sri Nagaraju, aged about 51 years, resident of Dasegowdanadoddi (Dasarahalli) Village, Kailancha Hobli, Ramanagara Taluk, Bengaluru South District, holder of Aadhaar Card No. 8941 1674 5994, do hereby declare and give public notice as follows:**
**The original registered documents related to the land situated at Survey No. 63/3, Harisandra Village, Kasaba Hobli, Ramanagara Taluk, were lost on 15-08-2025 while vacating the house and during shifting of household articles. Details of Lost Documents: 1) Book-1 Registered Document No. RMN-1-05822-2009-10, CD No. RMND 104, dated 01-12-2009. 2) Book-1 Registered Document No. RMN-1-06482-2007-08, CD No. RMND 72, dated 23-01-2008.**
**I have lodged a complaint regarding the loss of the above documents at the Rural Police Station and obtained an acknowledgment bearing CSR/Receipt No. 1798447/2025 dated 12-09-2025.**
**I solemnly declare that the said documents have not been misused or used for any unlawful purpose by me.**
**If anyone finds the above-mentioned documents, they are requested to kindly return the same to me or contact me at the Below mentioned Adress.**
**This public notice is issued for the information of the general public and for submission before the concerned Sub-Registrar Office/ Revenue Authorities/Banks/and other concerned departments.**
**If any person has any claim, right, or objection with respect to the above land or documents, they should inform the undersigned within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. Failing which, it shall be presumed that no such claim or objection exists.**
**Contact Adress:**
**Smt. Lakshmi wife of Sri. Nagaraju, Dasegowdanadoddi (Dasarahalli) Village, Kailancha Hobli, Ramanagara Taluk, Bengaluru South District,**
**Mobile No. 9731505578,**
**Place: Ramanagara.**
**Date: 29-01-2025**



**Government of Karnataka**
**EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, RURAL DEVELOPMENT PANCHAYAT RAJ ENGINEERING PROJECT DIVISION, KALABURAGI**
No: EE/RDPRE/PD/KLB/KKRDB/TS/TND/2025-26/778 Date: 28.01.2026
**SHORT TERM TENDER NOTIFICATION**
**(Through E-Procurement Two Cover System)**
1) Name of Work & Amount put to tender : **1. KRRDA/2025-26/RD/WORK_INDENT 309-APT-RS.1,04,65,796.21, 2.KRRDA/2025-26/RD/WORK_INDENT310-APT-RS.1,04,40,348.79,** 2) Head of account : **2025-26 KKRDB,** 3) Class of Contractor : Class-III & above, 4) Issue of Blank Tender Documents : **28.01.2026 to 10.02.2026 upto 4.00** pm 5) Tender From Fee : As per KPPP Norms, 6) E.M.D. Fee : As Mentioned in KPPP Portal, 7) Receipt of completed tender documents : **28.01.2026 to 10.02.2026 upto 4.00 pm**, 8) Technical Bid opening Date: **11.02.2026 after 4.01 pm.** 9) Financial Bid opening Date: **12.02.2026 after 11.00 pm.** 10) For more details contact : Office of the Executive Engineer, RDPRE Project Division, Rajapur road, Kalaburagi, 11) website address : **www.kppp.karnataka.gov.in.**
DIPR/Kalaburagi/1024/Deshpande Publicity/2025-26
Sd/- **Executive Engineer,**
RDPRE Project Division, Kalaburagi



**VISVESVARAYA TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY**
"Jnana Sangama", Belagavi - 590018, Karnataka
Ref.No: VTU/BGM/RE/2025-26/IFT No.127/5666 Date: 27-01-2026
**TENDER NOTIFICATION**
**(Two Cover System) - (Through KPP Portal Only)**
The e-Tender is invited in duplicate from eligible Tenderers, registered Contractor, by the Registrar, Visvesvaraya Technological University, "Jnana Sangama", Belagavi - 18, under standard tender document procedure K/W format for the work of **Renovation and Other Minor Works to Guest House Building at VTU, Regional Centre, Kalaburagi. Amounting to Rs. 80,50,457/- (Excluding GST).** Other details log on to Website: **https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in on 27-01-2026.**
DIPR/Belagavi/1716/Adverto/2025-26
**Sd/- Registrar**
**VTU, Belagavi**



**GOVERNMENT OF KARNATAKA**
**MINOR IRRIGATION & GROUND WATER DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**
**M.I & G.W.D.D. DIVISION, VIJAYAPUR**
**No.EE/MID/VJP/AE-4/4702/TND/2025-26/ 4124 Date: 29.01.2026**
**SHORT TERM TENDER NOTIFICATION**
The Executive Engineer, Minor Irrigation and Ground Water Development Department, Division Vijaypur invites work tenders through "E-Procurement" from eligible contractor on item rate Tender for following works as per KTPP Act-2000 and latest amendments.
**4702 Major Works :-** Total 1Work, Amount put to Tender **Rs.55.08 Lakhs**, **Tender Period for the above work is Six(6) Months including monsoon.**
**4702 SCP Works :-** Total 3 Works, Amount put to Tender **Rs.883.90 Lakhs**, **Tender Period for the above works are One(1) to Eleven(11) Months including monsoon..**
Tender documents may be downloaded from Government of Karnataka E-Procurement website https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in/#/portal/portal-home under login for Contractors from **02.02.2026.** Tenders may be submitted on electronically in E-Procurement portal up to **17-30 hrs.** on **10.02.2026.** Interested contractors information regarding works may be obtained from this office or e-Procurement helpdesk (Ph.No.080-25501216 & 080-25501227) upto **17-30 hrs.** on **09.02.2026.** Pre-bid meeting will be held on **06.02.2026** for work costing above 1.00Crore in the office of the Executive Engineer, MI&GWDD Division, Vijaypur. Tenders shall be quoted without adding GST and other details can be seen in the tender documents.
**Sd/- Executive Engineer,**
**MI & GWDD Division, Vijayapur**
ವಾಸಾಸಂಇ/ವಿಜಯಪುರ/646/ಕೆಎಸ್ಎಂಸಿಎ/2025–26



**CAUVERY NEERAVARI NIGAMA LIMITED**
(A GOVERNMENT OF KARNATAKA ENTERPRISES)
Office Of The Executive Engineer, No.2, K.C. Division, Kollegal – 571 440, Chamarajanagar District.
Phone: 08224-252287
**Short Term Tender Notification No. 19/2025-26 Dated: 27-01-2026 (Call-2)**
(THROUGH KPP-PORTAL ONLY)
On the behalf of the Managing Director, CNNL, Bangalore, the Executive Engineer, CNNL, No.2, KC Division, Kollegala, the undersigned invites Re-Call tender for the work of "Replacement of Head sluice service Gates (each 2 vent) and repair of 2 no. of stop log in URP DAM in Ajjipura Village in Hanur Taluk" from registered and eligible contractors for Amount put to Tender: Rs. 160.29 lakhs ;EMD: Rs. 2.41 lakhs; Tender Processing Fee: As per KPP-Portal The contractor has to submit his tender through online KPP-Portal only. More information can be had from the website: https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in Last date for any queries: 02-02-2026 up to 4.00 PM, Last date for receipt of completed tender and EMD: 03-02-2026 up to 5.30 PM. Date of opening of Technical Bid: 05-02-2026 at 10.30 AM Date of opening of Financial Bid: After approval of Technical Bid Any other details required can be obtained from the office of the undersigned during office hours.
DIPR/CHANAGAR/665/2025-26
Sd/-
EXECUTIVE ENGINEER
No.2, K.C. Division, Kollegal



**NAME CHANGE**
I, **JARINA** W/o Ateeq, aged 36 years, resident of Gurupura Village and PO, Hanagodu Hobli, Hunsur Taluk, Mysore District, have changed my name to **JARINA BHANU**, vide affidavit dated: 29.01.2026, before Notary VEERESH RAO BOBADE, Mysore



**NAME CHANGE**
I, **NABIS KHAN NAINA MOHAMMED** S/o Naina Mohammed, resident of No. 08, 'G' Block, Moore Road, Frazer Town, Bangalore-560005, have changed my Minor Son's name from **N. SAIFULLAH to N. SAFIULLAH,** vide affidavit dated: 28.01.2026, before Notary CHANDRASHEKAR .M, Bengaluru.



**SER INDUSTRIES LIMITED**
CIN: L60231KA1963PLC004604
**Regd. Office:** Chikkakuntanahalli Village Bidadi Hobli Ramnagaram Taluk, Bengaluru - 562109.; **Corporate Office:** Plot No 79, 501, 5th Floor Lalwani House, Sakore Nagar Viman Nagar, Pune, Maharashtra, India, 411014
**Mobile:** +91-7249049195; **Email:** info.serindustries@gmail.com
**Website:** ser-industries.co.in
**NOTICE OF THE EXTRA ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING AND INFORMATION E-VOTING**
Notice is hereby given that the Extra-Ordinary General Meeting ("EGM") of the members of SER Industries Limited (Company"), will be held on Friday, February 20, 2026 at 9:00 A.M. (IST) through Video Conferencing (VC*) / Other Audio Visual Means (OAVM*), in compliance with all the applicable provisions of the Companies Act 2013 and the Rules made thereunder and the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015 read with all applicable circulars on the matter issued by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) and Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to transact the business as stated out in the Notice of the EGM (Notice").
The Company has electronically sent the Notice of the EGM along with the Explanatory Statement on January 28, 2026 to all the members who have registered their e-mail addresses with the Company/Depositories/Depository Participants ("DPs") /Registrar and Share Transfer Agent ("RTA"), The Notice of the EGM is also hosted on the Company's website at https://www.ser-industries.co.in/ besides being available on the website of Stock Exchange i.e. BSE Limited at www.bseindia.com and on the website of MUFG Intime India Private Limited (Formerly known as Link Intime India Private Limited) at https://in.mpms.mufg.com/.
The documents referred to in the Notice of the EGM are available electronically for inspection by the members from the date of circulation of the Notice of the EGM. Members seeking to inspect such documents can send an e-mail to info.serindustries@gmail.com mentioning his / her / its folio number / DP ID and Client ID.
Remote e-voting and e-voting during EGM:
The Company is providing to its members, facility to exercise their right to vote on resolutions proposed to be passed at EGM by electronic means ('e-voting). Members may cast their votes remotely on the dates mentioned herein below for remote e-voting"). The Company has engaged the services of MUFG as the agency to provide e-voting facility.
Information and instructions comprising manner of e-voting, including e-voting remotely by members holding shares in dematerialized mode, physical mode and for members who have not registered their email address has been provided in the Notice of the EGM. The manner in which (a) persons who become members of the Company after dispatch of the Notice of the EGM and holding shares as on the Cut-off Date (February 13, 2026); (b) members who have forgotten the User ID and Password, can obtain / generate the User ID and Password, has also been provided in the Notice of the EGM.
The remote e-voting facility will be available during the following voting period:
Commencement of remote e-voting: **9:00 A.M. (IST) on Tuesday, February 17, 2026**
End of remote e-voting: **5:00 P.M (IST) on Thursday, February 19, 2026**
The remote e-voting will not be allowed beyond the aforesaid date and time and the remote e-voting module shall be forthwith disabled upon expiry of the aforesaid period.
Members attending the EGM who have not cast vote(s) by remote e-voting will be able to vote electronically at the EGM.
**Only a person, whose name is recorded as on the Cut-off Date, i.e., Friday, February 13, 2026, in the Register of members / Register of beneficial owners maintained by the Depositories, shall be entitled to avail the facility of remote e-voting or voting.**
**Manner of registering / updating e-mail address:**
a) Members holding shares in physical mode, who have not registered / updated their e-mail address with the Company, are requested to register / update their e-mail address by submitting Form ISR-1 duly filled and signed along with requisite supporting documents to MUFG Intime India Private Limited at C-101, 1st Floor, 247 Park, Lal Bahadur Shastri Marg, Vikhroli (West),Mumbai - 400 083
b) Members holding shares in dematerialized mode, who have not registered updated their e-mail address with their Depository Participants), are requested to register / update the same with the Depository Participants) where they maintain their demat accounts.
**Joining the EGM through VC / OAVM:**
The information about login credentials to be used and the steps to be followed for attending the EGM are explained in Notes of the Notice of EGM. Members who have cast their vote(s) by remote e-voting may also attend the EGM but shall not be entitled to cast their vote(s) again at the EGM.
For any query relating to attending the EGM through VC/OAVM or e-Voting before/ during the EGM, members may send a request to evoting@nsdl.com or contact on - Tel: 022 - 48867000.
**For SER Industries Limited**
**Sd/-**
**Sunil Kumar Shahi**
**Director**
**Dated on this January 29, 2026 at Pune.**

QUICK READ

## Laddu scam: SRCP demands CM Naidu's apology

**Amaravati**

The YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) on Thursday demanded that Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan apologise to devotees, after a chargesheet filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) that came into public domain, confirmed that no animal fat was used in sacred Tirupati laddus. 'Truth prevails', was how YSRCP reacted to reports that the CBI in its chargesheet filed in a court in Nellore last week confirmed that there was no animal fat in the ghee used for making laddus by the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD).

## SC stays UGC's new equity regulations, issues notice

**New Delhi**

In an interim order passed on Thursday, the Supreme Court stayed the operation of the University Grants Commission (Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions) Regulations, 2026. Issuing notice to the Centre and the UGC, a Bench of Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi directed that the 2026 Regulations shall remain in abeyance and ordered that the 2012 UGC Regulations will continue to operate until further orders. The CJI Kant-led Bench was hearing a clutch of petitions contending that the new regulations could result in discrimination against individuals in the general category and expressed concern over the denial of effective grievance redressal mechanisms for them.

## AP mulls law for 'age-appropriate digital access'

**Amaravati**

The government of Andhra Pradesh will study legal frameworks for 'age-appropriate access' to social media, Minister for Information Technology and Electronics Nara Lokesh said on Thursday. He said the government would ensure social media becomes a safer space and reduce its damaging impact, especially for women and children. Trust in social media is breaking down. Children are slipping into relentless usage, affecting their attention spans and education. Women are facing nonstop online abuse. This cannot be ignored, Lokesh posted on 'X'. The Andhra Pradesh Government has decided to act. In the meeting of the Group of Ministers on Social Media, we have ordered a study of legal frameworks for age-appropriate access.

# Adhikari moves HC over 'targeted attacks' on opposition leaders

The move comes after police imposed prohibitory orders around Anandapur fire site, following his announcement to visit the site

**KOLKATA**

Leader of the Opposition in the West Bengal Assembly Suvendu Adhikari on Thursday approached a single-judge bench of the Calcutta High Court, seeking permission to visit the site of a gutted warehouse in Anandapur on the southern outskirts of Kolkata, where the remains of 21 individuals have been recovered and several others are still reported missing.

Adhikari moved the court after police imposed prohibitory orders within a 100-metre radius of the burned warehouse, following his announcement to visit the site and lead a protest march.

He has accused the state government of negligence in handling the incident and alleged that the restrictions were imposed to prevent him from reaching the spot.

The petition has been admitted by a single-judge bench headed by Justice Suvra Ghosh. The date for the first hearing is yet to be announced.

Before approaching the court, the LoP had sought permission from the local police to visit the site and conduct a protest march. However, the Narendrapur Police Station denied permission, citing concerns over traffic congestion and public inconvenience. Police officials said the presence of schools and hospitals in the area meant that any political programme could disrupt students, patients, and their families.

Subsequently, the police imposed prohibitory orders around the warehouse. In the official notice, authorities stated that the restrictions were necessary to prevent destruction of evidence, obstruction of the ongoing investigation, and interference with rescue operations.

Adhikari, however, claimed that the prohibitory orders were imposed four days after the fire broke out, specifically to stop his visit. This is nothing new for me. I am often denied police permission for programmes, and later I get relief from the Calcutta High Court, he told reporters, expressing confidence that the court would allow his visit.

Meanwhile, fresh allegations emerged regarding the response to the fire. On Thursday, the first eyewitness and the person who alerted the fire services said the tragedy could have been avoided if the state fire services had acted promptly instead of losing time over jurisdictional procedures.

# OPS makes AIADMK reunion pitch

**THENI**

Former Chief Minister and coordinator of the AIADMK Cadres' Rights Retrieval Committee O Panneerselvam (OPS) on Thursday said that he and his supporters are ready to reunite with the AIADMK and questioned whether TTV Dhinakaran and Edappadi K Palaniswami (EPS) are prepared for such unity.

Addressing the media at Periyakulam in Theni district, OPS said spreading rumours through television channels and YouTube without any concrete decision being taken was dangerous for democracy.

Referring to TTV Dhinakaran's statement about OPS joining the NDA alliance, OPS said it was made based on friendship.

"Both TTV Dhinakaran and my 'dear elder brother' Edappadi Palaniswami want the AIADMK to win, and I share the same view. If TTV Dhinakaran wishes, efforts should be made to facilitate unity," he said.

OPS alleged that the so called "second Dharma Yuddham" was created by former AIADMK leaders Manoj Pandian and R Vaithilingam, who have since joined the DMK. He reiterated that the movement was not started for elections but to reclaim the party.

"We are ready to reunite with the AIADMK. Are TTV Dhinakaran and Edappadi Palaniswami ready?" he asked.

He asked whether TTV Dhinakaran and Edappadi K Palaniswami (EPS) are prepared for such unity

Explaining his decision to contest as an independent candidate from Ramanathapuram in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, OPS said it was mainly to assess whether party workers would stand with him.

He said he had only 12 days for campaigning and alleged that conspiracies were hatched by six candidates, fielded against him in Tamil Nadu using his name.

OPS said his objective was to defeat such conspiracies and reclaim the AIADMK through legal battles.

**'No decision on new party formation'**

He clarified that no decision has been taken yet on whether to form a separate party or contest elections independently. He said his continuous legal struggle was only to retrieve the party and urged people not to create unnecessary confusion.

## Punjab BJP chief cautions CM for doing politics on Guru Ravidas

**CHANDIGARH**

Bharatiya Janata Party's Punjab unit president Sunil Jakhar on Thursday cautioned Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann against indulging in petty politics in the name of Guru Ravidas, saying such behaviour does not befit someone holding the office of Chief Minister.

He said Prime Minister Narendra Modi is well aware of the sentiments of the people of Punjab, and that is why he already announced in 2024 during his Punjab visit that the Adampur Airport would be named after Guru Ravidas. Now that the Prime Minister is coming to formally inaugurate the naming of the airport, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, instead of welcoming him, has started indulging in cheap politics, Jakhar said in a statement.

The state BJP president said that on February 1, the Union Budget is being presented in Parliament, yet Prime Minister Modi is coming to Punjab on Guru Ravidas Prakash Purab. It is surprising, he said, adding, the Chief Minister is still unable to understand or respect the Prime Minister's reverence.

Jakhar recalled that when the Prime Minister visited Hoshiarpur on May 23, 2024, he had announced on the same day in his speech that the Adampur airport would be named after Sant Shiromani Sri Guru Ravidas.

He said now, when Prime Minister Modi is coming to Punjab to formally name the airport after Guru Ravidas, and when the Prime Minister's Office has already officially released the programme for the airport's naming ceremony, the Chief Minister has resorted to petty politics by tweeting and demanding that the airport be named after Guru Ravidas.

*'The arrest came after technical surveillance, financial trail analysis, and examination of digital communication linked to the alleged scam'*

## Man arrested in Bengal over Rs 3.35 cr stock market fraud case

**KOLKATA**

The police on Thursday arrested a man from South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal for his alleged involvement in a major cyber fraud case in which a resident of Kolkata was cheated of Rs 3.35 crore under the guise of high-yield stock market investments.

The accused has been identified as Hasan Molla and was apprehended from South 24 Parganas following a detailed investigation carried out by the Cyber Crime branch of the Kolkata Police. Officials said the arrest came after technical surveillance, financial trail analysis, and examination of digital communication linked to the alleged scam.

According to police, the victim, Ashish Kumar Ghora (56) of Kolkata's Entally area was lured into a WhatsApp group that promised exceptionally high returns from stock market investments within a short period. Investigators said the group was allegedly operated by Hasan Molla and his associates.

Police sources revealed that after being added to the WhatsApp group, the victim was regularly shown investment tips, screenshots of supposed profits, and messages from other group members portraying successful returns. Hasan first added the victim to a WhatsApp group that had several other members. The group allegedly promised high returns in a short time through stock market investments and regularly shared advice on where to invest for substantial profits, a police officer said.

Believing the operation to be genuine, Ghora followed the instructions provided within the group and transferred approximately Rs 3.35 crore to multiple bank accounts over time. The fraud came to light when the victim attempted to withdraw his supposed earnings and found that the option was blocked. Subsequent attempts to contact the group administrators reportedly failed, prompting him to realise he had been cheated.

Ghora then approached the Cyber Crime branch of the Kolkata Police and lodged a formal complaint, after which a case was registered and an investigation launched.

## Welfare scheme: Calcutta HC seeks WB government's explanation

**KOLKATA**

A division bench of the Calcutta High Court on Thursday sought an explanation from the West Bengal government over the alleged stoppage of financial benefits under a women-oriented state welfare scheme in a village panchayat in East Midnapore district. The court directed the state to submit a detailed report within the next two weeks.

The division bench, comprising Chief Justice Sujoy Paul and Justice Partha Sarathi Sen, passed the order while hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) accusing the state government of freezing payments under the Laxmir Bhandar scheme for around 7,000 women in Bagcha Village Panchayat.

Bagcha Village Panchayat falls under the Moyna Assembly constituency in East Midnapore, where the elected legislator is Ashok Dinda of the Bharatiya Janata Party. East Midnapore is also the native district of Suvendu Adhikari, the Leader of the Opposition in the West Bengal Assembly, giving the issue additional political significance.

Laxmir Bhandar is a flagship monthly financial assistance scheme of the West Bengal government aimed at supporting women. Under the scheme, women belonging to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities receive Rs 1,200 per month, while women from other categories are entitled to Rs 1,000 per month, credited directly to their bank accounts.

During the hearing, senior advocate Bilwadal Bhattacharya, appearing for the petitioner, argued that the benefits for approximately 7,000 women in Bagcha Village Panchayat had been stopped since September last year. He alleged that the freeze was deliberate and politically motivated, claiming it was imposed because the panchayat is administered by the BJP.

Bhattacharya further submitted that the stoppage of benefits violated the scheme's guidelines, which mandate that the financial assistance be directly transferred from the District Magistrate's office to the beneficiaries' bank accounts, without any interference at the local administrative level.

Taking note of the submissions, the division bench directed the West Bengal government to clarify the reasons for the alleged stoppage and to place a comprehensive report before the court within two weeks. The court is expected to examine whether the benefits were withheld arbitrarily and if any political considerations influenced the implementation of the welfare scheme.

# Mizoram CM calls on youth to shun drugs

**AIZAWL**

Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma on Thursday once again appealed to the youth and all sections of society to stay away from drugs and actively participate in combating the growing menace of substance abuse in the state. He made the remarks while inaugurating the National Cadet Corps (NCC) Mizoram Group Headquarters in Aizawl.

Expressing deep concern over the rising impact of drug abuse among young people, the Chief Minister stressed the urgent need to protect the youth from harmful influences. He said that disciplined, capable, and committed young individuals should be given wider platforms and opportunities to showcase their talents and skills, enabling them to contribute positively to society.

Lalduhoma said the decision to establish a separate NCC Group Headquarters in Mizoram was taken with this very objective in mind. The new headquarters is expected to strengthen NCC activities in the state, provide structured training to cadets, and promote values such as discipline, leadership, and national service among the youth.

Highlighting the government's efforts to curb the drug problem, the Chief Minister recalled that the Mizoram government had launched a special four-month-long operation between September and December 2025 to check the smuggling of drugs into the state, particularly from Myanmar. The operation was carried out by the state police in coordination with the Excise and Narcotics Department and the Young Mizo Association (YMA), the largest civil society organisation in Mizoram.

Alongside enforcement measures, awareness campaigns were also conducted to educate people, especially young citizens, about the dangers of drug addiction and the long-term consequences it poses to individuals, families, and society at large. Lalduhoma said such combined efforts of law enforcement and community participation were essential to effectively tackle the drug menace.

Following the inaugural programme, the Chief Minister held a meeting with ministers and senior NCC officers to discuss the functioning of the newly established headquarters and future plans for expanding NCC activities across the state.

WINNING GESTURE

# *MP CM welcomes Padma Shri awardees at his residence*

**BHOPAL**

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Thursday welcomed Padma Shri awardees Kailash Chandra Pant and Mohan Nagar at his official residence here and congratulated them for their achievements. The Chief Minister honoured the awardees by presenting them with a shawl and an idol of Lord Mahakal.

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav today welcomed Kailash Chandra Pant and Mohan Nagar, who have been selected for the Padma Shri award,

and extended his congratulations, the Chief Minister's Office said in a statement.

Senior litterateur and journalist Kailash Chandra Pant and social worker Mohan Nagar are among the four personalities from Madhya Pradesh selected for the Padma Shri, the country's fourth-highest civilian award, in recognition of their contributions in different fields.

Pant (89), a resident of Sagar district, will receive the Padma Shri for his outstanding contribution to Hindi literature. Mohan Nagar, hailing from Rajgarh district, has been selected for the award in the field of social service, particularly for his work in environmental protection.

Expressing his happiness, Pant had earlier said on January 25 that receiving the Padma Shri was a moment of pride for him and his family. This honour is not only a matter of pride for me but also for everyone working in the field of Hindi literature and education. Most of my literary work is based on critical essays, along with some independent writings, he said.

Mohan Nagar, who is currently serving as Vice-President of the Madhya Pradesh Jan Abhiyan Parishad, said he was engaged in serving the Narmada River and leading a cleanliness campaign when he learned about the honour. He is also actively involved in education-related initiatives in the tribal-dominated Betul district. Two other personalities from Madhya Pradesh Bhagwan Das Raikwar (Sports) and Narayan Vyas (Archaeology) have also been selected for the Padma Shri this year.

## QUICK READ

### 6-year-old girl 'gang-raped' by 3 minors in Delhi

**New Delhi**

A six-year-old girl was allegedly gang-raped by three boys, all under the age of 15, in northeast Delhi's Bhajanpura, the police said. The three accused - 13, 14 and 15 years old - have been detained, the police said. They said the girl's family reported the matter on January 18, and the police swung into action immediately. All the accused live in the same locality. The mother of one of the accused handed her son over to the police herself after seeing my daughter's condition. I want strict punishment for all those responsible, she said. Residents of Bhajanpura alleged a slow probe in the case. They have been holding street protests in the area for the last four days.

### Locals find 'ancient' coins in MP's Khajuraho

**Khajuraho**

All eyes turned to a quiet village near Madhya Pradesh's Khajuraho where old gold-like coins were unearthed in the Rajgarh village. Locals claimed the coins could be around 500 years old, though officials say the authenticity and age are yet to be confirmed. Near the Rajgarh Fort, soil was brought to level the road leading to the Swargeshwar Mahadev temple. After the area received rainfall a week ago, some locals saw a sparkle in the wet mud. They picked up what they found out to be coins and took them home. News of the discovery spread like wildfire, prompting villagers to gather at the spot and stay overnight to continue digging in search of similar treasures. Photos of coins shared on social media show a coin bearing what seems to be an ancient symbol.

### Delhi court acquits Lt Governor in defamation case

**New Delhi**

A court here on Thursday acquitted Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena in a 25-year-old defamation case filed by activist Medha Patkar, stating that the complainant failed to prove her charges against him. The order was pronounced by Judicial Magistrate First Class Raghav Sharma. In March 2025, the court had dismissed Patkar's application to examine additional witnesses in the case, terming it a deliberate attempt to delay the trial, rather than a genuine necessity. Medha Patkar and V K Saxena had been locked in a legal tussle since 2000 after she filed a suit against him for publishing advertisements against her and the 'Narmada Bachao Andolan'.

AJIT PAWAR DEATH

# 'Black box in custody': Centre promises time-bound probe

Civil Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu assured Maharashtra CM that his ministry has begun the probe and that it will be conducted in a transparent and time-bound manner.

**PUNE**

Union Civil Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu Kinjarapu on Thursday informed Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis that the black box of the ill-fated aircraft carrying Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, which crashed on Wednesday, has been recovered and taken into official custody.

In a letter responding to Fadnavis, the Union minister said the recovery of the black box marked a crucial step in determining the cause of the crash. The incident resulted in the death of four other people on board, sending shockwaves across the state and prompting swift action from aviation authorities.

Naidu further stated that the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB), which functions under the Union Civil Aviation Ministry, has formally launched an investigation into the crash. He assured the chief minister that the probe would be carried out strictly in accordance with the Aircraft Accident and Incident Rules.

As per the Aircraft Accident and Incident Rules, the investigation has begun and will be conducted in a transparent and time-bound manner, Naidu said in the letter. He added that all relevant evidence is being closely examined to establish the precise sequence of events that led to the tragedy.

According to the communication, investigators are scrutinising technical records of the aircraft, operational details related to the flight, and findings from the crash site. Data retrieved from the black box is expected to play a key role in reconstructing the final moments of the flight and identifying any mechanical, human, or environmental factors that may have contributed to the accident.

The Civil Aviation Minister also conveyed that the ministry is committed to ensuring full cooperation with the investigation and maintaining transparency throughout the process. He said the findings would help strengthen aviation safety protocols and prevent similar incidents in the future.

The crash has raised serious concerns over flight safety and operational procedures, given the high-profile nature of the passengers involved. State and central authorities have expressed condolences to the families of those who lost their lives and assured them of a thorough inquiry.

# 'On the same page': Tharoor after meeting Rahul, Kharge

**Thanks to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and LOP Rahul Gandhi for a warm and constructive discussion today on a wide range of subjects. We are all on the same page as we move forward in the service of the people of India.**

—Shashi Tharoor, Congress MP

**NEW DELHI**

**The Congress MP said that there was nothing unusual about meeting party leaders ahead of the new Parliament session.**

Congress Member of Parliament Shashi Tharoor on Thursday met Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi and party president Mallikarjun Kharge in Parliament, firmly brushing aside speculation of a rift within the party and describing the interaction as routine.

Ahead of the meeting in New Delhi, Tharoor downplayed media chatter suggesting internal discord within the Congress. Speaking to reporters, he questioned the basis of such speculation and stressed that meeting senior party leaders was a normal part of parliamentary and party functioning. I am going to attend Parliament right now. When it happens, I will let you know. What is so unusual about meeting my own party leader? Tharoor said, dismissing suggestions of any political significance attached to the meeting.

The interaction took place amid ongoing discussions within the Congress over organisational matters, parliamentary strategy, and preparations for upcoming political challenges. In recent weeks, speculation had surfaced in political circles and sections of the media about differences between Tharoor and the party leadership, particularly following his comments on various policy and political issues. However, the senior Congress leader has consistently rejected the notion of any internal rift.

Following the meeting, Tharoor took to social media to underline the unity within the party and to clarify the outcome of the discussions. "Thanks to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and LOP Rahul Gandhi for a warm and constructive discussion today on a wide range of subjects. We are all on the same page as we move forward in the service of the people of India," he posted.

Party sources described the meeting as cordial and wide-ranging, covering parliamentary business, national political developments, and the Congress's role as the principal opposition. They said such interactions are part of regular consultations among senior leaders and should not be read as extraordinary.

The Congress leadership has, in recent months, emphasised internal cohesion as the party seeks to strengthen its organisational structure and sharpen its opposition to the ruling government. Both Rahul Gandhi and Kharge have repeatedly stressed the importance of collective leadership and open dialogue within the party.

# Tension grips Vikasnagar after Kashmiri shawl sellers assaulted

**DEHRADUN**

Tension prevailed in the Vikasnagar area of Dehradun district on Thursday after two men from Kashmir, who earn their livelihood as shawl sellers, were allegedly assaulted following religiously offensive remarks linked to the Pahalgam terror attack.

The incident prompted swift police action, with Uttarakhand Police registering a case and taking one accused into custody.

According to local reports, the two victims had gone to a shop on Dakpatthar Road to purchase snacks when the incident occurred. The shopkeeper allegedly began questioning them about their names, religion, and place of origin. What initially appeared to be a routine interaction reportedly escalated into a heated argument, culminating in a violent assault.

The victims alleged that after they made the purchase, the shopkeeper asked for their names. When one of them identified himself as Danish, the shopkeeper allegedly asked whether he was Muslim. Upon receiving an affirmative response, the shopkeeper reportedly inquired about their place of origin. When the two men said they were from Kashmir, the situation reportedly worsened.

According to the complaint, the shopkeeper allegedly made religious and casteist remarks, followed by objectionable comments linked to the Pahalgam terror attack. The victims claimed that shortly thereafter, the shopkeeper, along with his associates, assaulted them. Both men sustained serious injuries, and visible injury marks were observed on their bodies. One of the victims is reportedly a minor.

The injured were taken for medical treatment, and their condition is said to be stable. Police officials confirmed that statements of the victims have been recorded and that a case has been registered under relevant sections of the law, including provisions related to assault and promoting enmity on religious grounds. One accused has been detained, while efforts are underway to identify and apprehend others involved in the attack.

The incident triggered tension in the Vikasnagar area, with increased police deployment to prevent any further escalation. Senior police officials visited the spot and appealed to the public to maintain peace and not spread rumours. They assured that strict action would be taken against those found guilty.

# Himanta defends 'Miya-Muslim' remark, flags demographic threat

**GUWAHATI**

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday sought to clarify his controversial reference to Miyan Muslims while speaking about alleged infiltration into the state from Bangladesh, insisting that the terminology was not his own but drawn from observations made by the Supreme Court of India. His remarks have sparked fresh political debate as Assam heads toward Assembly elections later this year.

Addressing a public gathering, Sarma revived the sensitive issue of Miya Muslims, a term often used in Assam's political discourse in the context of alleged illegal migration from Bangladesh. He said critics attacking him over the use of the word should carefully read what the Supreme Court has said in various observations related to Assam and migration.

Those who are attacking me for my remarks on 'Miyan' should pause and read what the Supreme Court of India itself has said about Assam. This is not my language, not my imagination, and not political exaggeration. These are the Court's own words, Sarma said in a post on social media.

The Chief Minister went further to assert that both he and the Bharatiya Janata Party oppose what he described as the community's role in illegal infiltration. He urged people to put pressure on them and suggested that facing difficulties could compel them to leave the state. Sarma also claimed that earlier there was hesitation among people to express such views openly and called for what he described as a tougher approach.

His remarks, however, drew sharp criticism from opposition parties and civil society groups, who accused him of targeting a particular community and risking communal harmony for political gain ahead of elections. Critics argued that invoking Supreme Court observations selectively could not justify rhetoric that appears to stigmatise an entire group.

# Pregnant Delhi police commando beaten to death over dowry

**NEW DELHI**

A 27-year-old woman commando with the Delhi Police Special Cell's SWAT team died on Tuesday after allegedly being brutally assaulted by her husband during a domestic dispute in Delhi. The accused reportedly struck her on the head with a dumbbell, causing fatal injuries. The victim has been identified as Kajal, who, according to her family, was regularly assaulted by her husband, Ankur, and his family over dowry demands. The victim's father also revealed that she was four months pregnant at the time of her death.

My daughter was four months pregnant. Both the mother and the unborn child have died. Ankur has committed not one but two murders, the victim's father said. Police said the incident occurred on the night of January 22 at around 10 pm, when Ankur allegedly launched a violent attack on Kajal in a fit of rage. A forensic examination of their residence revealed bloodstains on the door frame and a dumbbell. Investigators suspect that Ankur repeatedly banged Kajal's head against the door and struck her with the dumbbell, leading to severe head injuries.

After the assault, Kajal was initially admitted to Tarak Hospital in Mohan Garden, Delhi, in critical condition. She was later shifted to a private hospital in Ghaziabad, where she succumbed to her injuries on Tuesday, January 27.

Police informed that Ankur himself took Kajal to the hospital after the incident.

Kajal completed her graduation in 2022, during which she met Ankur, a resident of Haryana's Sonipat, and their friendship later blossomed into a relationship. A year after that, with the consent of both families, the couple got married.

According to Kajal's brother and father, harassment began just 15 days after the wedding, with Ankur's family allegedly demanding a car and dowry.

# Crisis in BJP-Sena alliance over BMC mayor post, Bal Thackeray link

**MUMBAI**

After a nearly four-year delay in elections to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), Mumbai's cash-rich civic body, a fresh political impasse has emerged over who will occupy the powerful mayor's post. The deadlock has exposed growing strains within Maharashtra's ruling alliance, with coalition partners now locked in a serious tussle over control of the country's richest municipal corporation.

At the centre of the dispute is a demand by the Shiv Sena led by Eknath Shinde, which has sought the BMC mayor's position on a rotational basis. Under this proposal, the Shinde-led Sena wants to hold the mayor's office for the first two-and-a-half years of the five-year civic term, before passing it on to its alliance partner, the Bharatiya Janata Party.

The demand has reportedly met resistance within the BJP, deepening uncertainty over the future leadership of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, which governs Mumbai and controls an annual budget larger than that of several Indian states. Political observers note that control of the BMC is not merely symbolic but strategically crucial, given its financial muscle and influence over the city's infrastructure and governance.

For Shinde, the issue goes beyond a routine power-sharing negotiation. After engineering one of the most dramatic factional splits in Maharashtra's political history, Shinde was initially elevated to the chief minister's post. However, following subsequent political realignments, he now serves as deputy chief minister, a development seen by his supporters as a relative demotion. Securing the BMC mayor's chair is therefore viewed as vital to reinforcing his faction's political standing and relevance in Mumbai.

The timing of the demand adds further significance. The year 2026 marks the birth centenary of Bal Thackeray, the founder of the Shiv Sena, who had long envisioned Shiv Sainiks occupying every rung of political power in Maharashtra — from the chief minister's office to the BMC mayor's chair — simultaneously. Shinde's camp argues that holding the mayor's post during this milestone year would carry deep symbolic value for the party and its cadre.

MAHILA ROZAGAAR YOJANA

# *From Rs 10K to Rs 2L: Bihar CM announces top-up for beneficiaries*

**PATNA**

The Bihar government has significantly enhanced financial assistance under the Chief Minister's Women Employment Scheme, increasing the support amount from Rs 10,000 to up to Rs 2 lakh, with higher assistance now linked to the performance of beneficiaries. The decision aims to strengthen women's economic empowerment by encouraging sustainable self-employment and entrepreneurship across the state.

Chief Minister Nitish Kumar announced the decision following a cabinet meeting and shared details through social media, highlighting the government's focus on outcome-based welfare delivery. He said the enhanced financial assistance would be released in phases and would depend on an assessment of how effectively beneficiaries utilise the initial support to generate employment.

Under the revised framework of the scheme, women who have already received Rs 10,000 as the first instalment will become eligible for additional financial assistance after six months. This eligibility will be determined based on the evaluation of their work models and the extent to which the initial amount has been used productively to start or expand income-generating activities.

The process has been initiated to provide selected beneficiaries with additional financial assistance of up to Rs 2 lakh. This amount will be given in phases, provided the earlier amount was properly used for employment, the Chief Minister said. He added that the phased release mechanism is designed to ensure accountability, promote effective utilisation of funds, and reduce the risk of misuse.

Officials said the performance-linked structure would motivate beneficiaries to develop viable business models, improve financial discipline, and scale up their activities gradually. The assessment process is expected to include verification of employment outcomes, sustainability of the venture, and overall impact on the beneficiary's livelihood.

The Women Employment Scheme was originally launched to provide seed capital to women seeking to start small businesses, self-help initiatives, or other forms of self-employment. By substantially increasing the financial ceiling, the government aims to help women move beyond subsistence-level activities and build more robust enterprises capable of generating stable income. The move is also seen as part of Bihar's broader strategy to boost women's participation in the workforce and strengthen rural and urban livelihoods.

## QUICK READ

### Russia-Ukraine carry out new exchange of war dead

**Kyiv**

Russia and Ukraine said on Thursday that they had carried out the latest exchange of their war dead, a regular practice designed to allow relatives of those killed on the battlefield to bury their loved ones. Russia handed Ukraine 1,000 bodies of Ukrainian soldiers, the two countries said in statements. Kyiv had handed Moscow the bodies of 38 Russian soldiers, Kremlin aide Vladimir Medinsky said. Medinsky posted an image on Telegram of the exchange showing white refrigerated trucks parked on a snow-covered area next to a wood with people clad in white biohazard suits standing around.

### Russia urges US-Iran talks, warns against use of force

**Moscow**

Russia on Thursday said there was still room for negotiation between Iran and the United States, while cautioning that any use of force against Tehran would have dangerous consequences and risk plunging the Middle East into widespread chaos. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov made the remarks amid rising tensions over Iran's nuclear programme, a day after U.S. President Donald Trump urged Iran to return to negotiations and strike a deal or face the possibility of U.S. military action. Speaking to reporters, Peskov said Moscow believed diplomatic channels had not been exhausted and stressed that dialogue remained the only viable path to resolving disputes surrounding Iran's nuclear ambitions.

### Chechnya leader Kadyrov rejects Ukraine peace talks

**Moscow**

The leader of Russia's Chechnya region, Ramzan Kadyrov, said on Thursday that he was firmly opposed to any talks aimed at ending the war in Ukraine, arguing that Moscow should continue military operations until it achieves its objectives. Speaking to reporters at the Kremlin, Kadyrov said he believed the conflict should be pursued to its logical conclusion and rejected the idea of negotiations with Kyiv or its Western backers. I believe the war must be taken to its conclusion.

# UK PM signals reset in China ties, eyes economic wins

The visit comes at a time of shifting global alliances and reflects London's attempt to recalibrate relations with Beijing amid economic pressures and geopolitical uncertainty

**BEIJING**

After years of strained ties, China and the UK are looking to develop a long-term strategic partnership following a high-stakes meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Thursday.

Starmer is on a 4-day visit to China, the first trip by a British prime minister in eight years — signaling an attempt at resetting relations between the two countries after years of distrust and acrimony.

Beijing's crackdowns on democratic protests in Hong Kong, a former British colony, and imposition of a sweeping national security legislation in 2020 strained bilateral ties, while U.K. businesses in China have flagged a challenging business climate in the country.

The UK has often accused China of conducting espionage in the country, and labeled it as a long-term strategic challenge. Financial Times reported on Tuesday that British officials were planning to tighten scrutiny of Chinese activity over national security concerns.

The British government as recently as December moved to clamp down on two tech companies based in China, allegedly for carrying out cyberattacks that it said had undermined UK security and prosperity. Against that backdrop, Thursday's developments signal a positive shift in relations. The two countries said they will expand cooperation in key areas including education, healthcare, finance and artificial intelligence research, biological sciences and new energy development.

Beijing will also consider opening visa-free entry for British nationals, the statement said, while urging London to create a fair and non-discriminatory environment for Chinese firms operating in the UK.Starmer told Xi at the start of the meeting that it was "vital that we build a more sophisticated relationship" allowing both sides to identify areas for further collaborations and dialogue, as per agencies.

London will maintain high-level close communications with Beijing and deepen trade and investment partnerships, according to the Chinese readout.

Speaking to reporters following the summit with Xi, Starmer described the meeting as "positive" and one that delivered "productive outcome," adding that the relationship was in a "good, strong place."

**KEY POINTS**

- China is willing to develop a long-term strategic partnership with the UK, China's Xi Jinping told British Prime Minister Keir Starmer Thursday.
- UK is looking to build "more sophisticated" ties with China, Starmer said.
- Starmer started the four-day visit on Wednesday, marking the first visit by a British prime minister in eight years.

**TURNING TO CHINA?**

Starmer's trip comes at a time when U.S. President Donald Trump's foreign policy and tariff threats have unsettled traditional allies, while Beijing has hosted several Western leaders just this month including Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, Ireland's Prime Minister Michael Martin — the first visit by an Irish leader in 14 years — and Finnish Prime Minister Petteri Orpo.

# ICE told to avoid agitators in Minnesota as enforcement shifts

**MINNEAPOLIS**

U.S. federal immigration officials in Minnesota have been given new internal instructions to minimise contact with so-called agitators as they continue carrying out enforcement operations under President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown, according to internal guidance reviewed by Reuters. The directive represents an operational shift intended to de-escalate tensions in the state after violent clashes during recent immigration raids.

The fresh guidance comes in the wake of two fatal shootings in Minneapolis, Minnesota, US involving federal agents and U.S. citizens protesting against immigration enforcement operations. The memo, issued by senior officials in the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Enforcement and Removal Operations division, instructs officers not to argue with or attempt to persuade protesters but instead to verbally issue clear commands if necessary. It explicitly states: DO NOT COMMUNICATE OR ENGAGE WITH AGITATORS, saying such interactions can unnecessarily inflame situations.

A key change in enforcement strategy outlined in the guidance is a renewed focus on what ICE terms targeted arrests. Officers are now directed to pursue only those non-citizens who have criminal charges or convictions — a departure from broader sweeps that included community stops and questioning. The new approach marks a return to a more legally narrow enforcement focus.

The shift comes amid heightened scrutiny of federal immigration tactics in Minnesota, with local leaders and judges criticising ICE for actions that federal courts have said violated multiple orders. In late January, a federal judge rebuked ICE for ignoring scores of court mandates tied to enforcement conduct, although a threatened contempt proceeding against the acting ICE director was later dropped after the agency complied with a court order to release a detainee.

Internal guidance directs ICE officers in Minnesota to avoid engaging with agitators and focus on immigrants with criminal histories.

# Right-wing populist Laura Fernandez leads Costa Rica polls

**COSTA RICAN**

Costa Ricans head into Sunday's presidential elections with opinion polls indicating that a right-wing populist candidate is the clear frontrunner, as a surge in drug trafficking and violent crime reshapes political priorities in the traditionally peaceful Central American nation. The contest is widely seen as a pivotal moment for Costa Rica, long known for its stable democracy and reputation as a safe tourist destination. Laura Fernandez, a 39-year-old political scientist and former presidential chief of staff, holds a commanding lead in the polls, signalling strong voter support for extending the political right's mandate. Fernandez's rise reflects growing public anxiety over security, with organized crime and narcotics trafficking increasingly spilling into the country and undermining its image as a regional exception to Central America's violence.

The election also highlights a broader regional trend: the growing appeal of strongman-style leadership across Latin America.

# Trump weighs Iran strikes to inspire renewed protests

**WASHINGTON**

U.S. President Donald Trump is weighing a range of options against Iran, including targeted strikes on Iranian security forces and senior leaders, aimed at encouraging renewed public protests, according to multiple sources familiar with the discussions. The deliberations come amid heightened tensions following a violent crackdown on nationwide demonstrations earlier this month.

Two U.S. sources said the president has expressed interest in creating conditions that could lead to what officials privately described as regime change, after Iranian authorities moved forcefully to suppress protests that erupted across the country. The crackdown reportedly resulted in the deaths of thousands of people, drawing international condemnation and renewed scrutiny of Tehran's internal security apparatus.

The options under consideration are said to be limited and precise, focusing on symbolic and operational targets within Iran's security structure rather than large-scale military action. The intent, according to the sources, would be to weaken the regime's ability to control dissent while emboldening protesters who have been silenced in recent weeks.

However, Israeli and Arab officials cautioned that air power alone is unlikely to topple Iran's clerical rulers. They stressed that while military pressure could damage key institutions or signal international resolve, it would not automatically translate into sustained internal unrest capable of bringing down the regime. Several regional officials noted that Iran's leadership has

historically demonstrated resilience in the face of external threats, often using them to rally domestic support.

The discussions reflect growing frustration within the Trump administration over Iran's response to protests and its broader regional posture. U.S. officials have long accused Tehran of destabilising the Middle East through its support for proxy groups and its actions in neighbouring countries. The recent unrest inside Iran has intensified debates in Washington over whether the moment presents an opportunity to apply sharper pressure.

At the same time, concerns remain over the risks of escalation. Analysts warn that even limited strikes could provoke retaliation by Iran or its allies, potentially dragging the region into a wider conflict. Arab officials, while critical of Iran's internal repression, have urged caution, warning that instability in Iran could have far-reaching consequences for regional security and energy markets. Publicly, the White House has not confirmed specific military plans, reiterating that all options remain on the table while emphasising support for the Iranian people's right to peaceful protest. Privately, however, the deliberations underscore a more aggressive tone in U.S. policy toward Tehran.

# 'Constitutional coup': India slams Pak

**NEW DELHI**

India targeted Pakistan on the global stage for giving supreme powers to its Defence Chief, Asim Munir, advising Islamabad to "introspect" on the role of its armed forces in constitutional developments. Parvathaneni Harish, India's representative at the United Nations, said the Shehbaz Sharif-led government enabled the military forces to "engineer a constitutional coup" through the recent 27th amendment, which gave "lifetime immunity to its chief of defence forces". "It could start by asking itself how it has let its armed forces engineer a constitutional coup through the 27th amendment and giving lifetime immunity to its Chief of Defence Forces," Harish said.

# China executes 11 members of Ming family crime syndicate

**BEIJING**

China has executed 11 members of the notorious Ming family criminal gang, which operated mafia-like scam centres in Myanmar and was accused of killing workers who attempted to escape, Chinese state media reported on Thursday. The executions mark one of the most severe crackdowns by Chinese authorities on transnational crime syndicates linked to large-scale online fraud networks in Southeast Asia. According to China's official, the individuals were sentenced to death in September after being convicted of serious crimes including homicide, illegal detention, and large-scale fraud. The report said the executions followed the completion of all legal procedures. The Ming family was identified as one of the so-called four families of northern Myanmar, powerful crime syndicates accused of running hundreds of compounds involved in internet scams, prostitution, and drug production. Members of these families were reported to have held influential positions in local government structures and militias aligned with Myanmar's ruling junta, giving them protection and operational freedom for years.

Two of the convicted defendants had appealed their death sentences, prompting the cases to be reviewed by the Supreme People's Court, China's highest judicial authority. Xinhua reported that the court upheld the original verdicts, clearing the way for the executions.

The Ming family gang was led by Ming Xuechang and was long associated with an infamous compound known as Crouching Tiger Villa, located in Kokang, a self-administered region along Myanmar's border with China. The compound became a symbol of the brutal scam industry that has trapped tens of thousands of people, many of them foreign nationals, who were lured by fake job offers and then forced to carry out online fraud.

According to China's state broadcaster China Central Television, at its peak the Ming family network employed as many as 10,000 people to conduct scams and other criminal activities. Workers who failed to meet targets or attempted to flee were allegedly subjected to torture, detention, or even killed, drawing widespread outrage in China.

Beijing has in recent years intensified efforts to dismantle scam centres operating in northern Myanmar, working with regional governments to repatriate Chinese nationals involved in or victimised by these operations. The executions send a strong signal of China's zero-tolerance approach toward organised crime networks that target Chinese citizens and undermine social stability.

## SU DO KU

**Brain-Bender: Can You Solve It?**

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Solutions to Yesterday's puzzle

**Fill a 9×9 grid with numbers so that each row, column and 3×3 section contain all of the digits between 1 and 9.**

**GAZA PEACE DEAL**

# *Israeli fire kills 2 in Gaza amid truce move*

**GAZA**

At least two Palestinians were killed by Israeli fire in the Gaza Strip on Thursday, according to local health officials, in the latest bout of violence threatening a fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. The incident comes as both sides seek to move forward with the second phase of a U.S.-brokered peace plan aimed at ending the prolonged conflict.

Medical officials said the two men were killed in eastern Khan Younis, near an area where Israeli forces are currently operating. The Israeli military, however, told Reuters that it was not aware of any casualties resulting from Israeli fire on Thursday, highlighting the conflicting accounts that have frequently accompanied incidents since the ceasefire began.

According to the Gaza health ministry, Israeli airstrikes, tank shelling, and gunfire have killed at least 490 people since the truce took effect in October, following two years of war that devastated much of the Palestinian enclave. Israel, for its part, has said that four of its soldiers have been killed by Palestinian militants in the same period within the small coastal territory.

The latest deaths have intensified mutual accusations of ceasefire violations. Both Israel and Hamas have blamed each other for undermining the truce, which has remained tenuous despite significantly reduced large-scale fighting compared with earlier phases of the war.

The ceasefire is part of a multi-phase peace framework brokered by the United States, with mediation support from Egypt and Qatar. While the initial phase focused on halting major hostilities and easing humanitarian conditions, the planned second phase addresses far more contentious political and security issues.

Among the most difficult challenges ahead is the question of Hamas disarmament, which Israel and its allies consider essential for long-term security. Hamas has long rejected any proposal to give up its weapons, describing them as necessary for resistance. The peace plan also envisions the possible deployment of an international peacekeeping force in Gaza, a proposal that raises complex questions about mandate, composition, and acceptance by the parties involved.

Analysts warn that incidents like Thursday's killings could derail progress toward phase two if not contained. With trust between the sides extremely low, even limited violence risks triggering retaliation and unraveling the ceasefire altogether.

QUICK READ

## Welfare, health cover and education take centre stage

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM**

State Finance Minister K.N. Balagopal on Thursday presented his sixth consecutive budget of the LDF government in the Kerala Assembly, opting for a full budget despite Assembly elections being scheduled later this year, when conventionally a vote-on-account is presented. The final budget of the second-term Pinarayi Vijayan government places strong emphasis on social security, healthcare, education and inclusive welfare measures, with a series of announcements aimed at students, workers and vulnerable sections. One of the key highlights is the introduction of accident insurance for students from Classes 1 to 12. The Finance Minister said the scheme would cost Rs 15 crore annually, which has been fully provided for in the budget.

## Silver crosses Rs 4 lakh mark per kg, gold jumps 6%

**NEW DELHI**

Gold and silver prices surged to record highs on Thursday, amid a rise in geopolitical tensions following US President Donald Trump's threat of military action against Iran. Strong buying demand, driven by central bank purchases and further weakening of the US dollar, also fuelled the rally. MCX gold February futures rose 5.99 per cent to Rs 1,75,885 per 10 grams around 10.45 am. Meanwhile, MCX silver March futures rose 4.24 per cent to Rs 4,01,699 per kg. International markets saw silver hovering around the $120-per-ounce mark, after a more than 60 per cent surge this year, supported by persistent supply constraints.

## NPAs of public sector banks at multi-decadal low

**NEW DELHI**

There has been a significant improvement in the asset quality of scheduled commercial banks with a sharp decline in the percentage of bad loans and higher recoveries, according to the Economic Survey 2025-26, tabled in the Parliament by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday. It points out that the gross non-performing asset (GNPA) ratio and net NPA ratio have reached multi-decadal lows while the capital-to-risk-weighted-asset ratio (CRAR) of banks remained strong at 17.2 per cent (as of September 2025).

ECONOMIC SURVEY 2025-26

# Infra continues to anchor India's growth strategy

Sustained public investment, integrated planning and deeper capital markets position infrastructure as a key growth multiplier, even as execution risks remain; The government has steadily raised public investments in infra since FY20.

**NEW DELHI**

India's infrastructure-led growth strategy continues to gain momentum, with the country ranked among the top five globally for private investment in infrastructure among low- and middle-income economies, according to the Economic Survey 2025-26 tabled on Thursday.

Citing rankings by the World Bank, the Survey underlined that infrastructure development remains central to India's long-term economic expansion. The Survey noted that sustained growth in public capital expenditure since FY15 has played a critical role in strengthening the country's infrastructure base.

This progress has been supported by the institutionalisation of multimodal planning through PM GatiShakti, along with complementary reforms such as the National Logistics Policy and the use of digital platforms. These measures have helped reduce transaction costs, improve coordination among ministries, and minimise execution risks in large infrastructure projects.

According to the Survey, capital expenditure has increased nearly 4.2 times over the past eight years, rising from Rs 2.63 lakh crore in FY18 to Rs 11.21 lakh crore in FY26 (Budget Estimates). In addition, effective capital expenditure for FY26 (BE) has been pegged at Rs 15.48 lakh crore. The government has positioned infrastructure as a key growth driver, recognising its strong multiplier effects on employment, productivity, and overall economic activity.

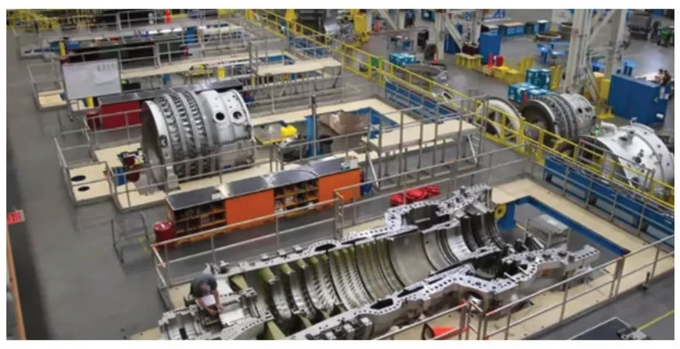
The Survey also highlighted a structural shift in infrastructure financing. India's financing landscape is increasingly diversifying beyond traditional bank credit, with non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) playing a larger role. NBFC credit to the commercial sector recorded a compound annual growth rate of 43.3% during FY20–FY25, reflecting growing depth and resilience in infrastructure funding sources. Significant progress has been reported in the transport sector. The National Highway network expanded by around 60%, from 91,287 kilometres in FY14 to 1,46,572 kilometres by FY26 (up to December). Operational high-speed corridors witnessed a nearly ten-fold increase, from 550 kilometres in FY14 to 5,364 kilometres in FY26 (up to December). Railway infrastructure has also seen notable advances.

### KEY INFRA DEVELOPMENTS (FY26)

- **MASSIVE CAPEX:** Total capital outlay is budgeted at ₹11.21 lakh crore for FY26, with an effective capex of ₹15.48 lakh crore, driving high multiplier effects for GDP.
- **TRANSPORTATION EXPANSION:** National highways increased by 60% from 91,287 km (FY14) to 1,46,572 km (FY26), while operational High-Speed Corridors grew nearly ten-fold to 5,364 km.
- **RAILWAY & AVIATION GROWTH:** Rail networks reached 69,439 route km with 99.1% electrification by Oct 2025. The aviation market boasts 164 airports, up from 74 in 2014.
- **POWER & ENERGY:** Installed capacity reached 509.74 GW by Nov 2025, with the demand-supply gap dropping to zero.
- **PRIVATE SECTOR ROLE:** Increased private investment is evident, with ₹2.1 trillion in equity capital deployed in infrastructure over the last two years.
- **STRATEGIC FOCUS:** The PM GatiShakti framework and National Logistics Policy are accelerating project execution, while the focus shifts to digital public infrastructure (DPI) and sustainability.

## Industrial sector navigate global headwinds with resilience

**NEW DELHI**



India's industrial sector continues to demonstrate resilience and strong momentum despite an evolving and challenging global environment, supported by sustained reforms in infrastructure, logistics, ease of doing business, and innovation systems, the Economic Survey 2025-26 stated on Thursday.

According to the Survey, the next phase of India's industrialisation will require a calibrated shift in strategy. It stressed the need to move away from a model largely centred on import substitution towards one focused on achieving scale, improving global competitiveness, fostering innovation, and enabling deeper integration into global value chains (GVCs). Rather than pursuing complete self-reliance across every segment, the Survey emphasised building strategic resilience through diversification and strengthening domestic capabilities.

The Survey highlighted that this transition would require a significant increase in private sector investment in research and development, technology adoption, skills enhancement, and robust quality systems. Such measures, it noted, are essential for Indian industry to compete effectively in global markets while adapting to technological change and shifting supply chains.

On performance indicators, the Economic Survey reported robust growth in manufacturing activity during the current fiscal. Manufacturing Gross Value Added (GVA) expanded by 7.72 per cent in the first quarter and 9.13 per cent in the second quarter of FY26, driven largely by ongoing structural shifts within the sector. These include a gradual transition toward higher-value manufacturing segments and increased formalisation across firms.

Overall industrial performance has also strengthened. Industry GVA grew by 7.0 per cent year-on-year in real terms during the first half of FY2025-26, marking a clear pickup from the 5.9 per cent growth recorded in the previous fiscal year, FY2024-25. The Survey, tabled in Parliament by Nirmala Sitharaman, attributed this improvement to policy continuity, infrastructure-led development, and better capacity utilisation.

The availability of industrial infrastructure has improved significantly through corridor-led development, industrial parks, and logistics upgrades. Greater adoption of digital technologies and compliance with formal systems have further enhanced productivity and efficiency across manufacturing units.

## Survey sees FY27 GDP growth at 6.8-7.2% in 'year of adjustment'

**NEW DELHI**

The Economic Survey has projected India's real GDP growth for the financial year 2026–27 in the range of 6.8 to 7.2 per cent, reflecting an outlook of steady domestic expansion amid a challenging and uncertain global environment.

The Survey noted that while global conditions remain volatile, their impact on India is expected to manifest more as external uncertainties rather than immediate macroeconomic stress.

According to the Survey, the domestic economy continues to remain on a stable footing. Inflation has moderated to historically low levels, providing relief to households and supporting consumption, although some firming is expected in the coming months. It also pointed out that balance sheets across households, firms, and banks have improved significantly, enhancing the economy's capacity to absorb external shocks. Public investment remains a key driver of activity, while consumption demand has shown resilience and private investment intentions are gradually strengthening.

The Survey highlighted that these favourable domestic conditions collectively provide a strong buffer against global headwinds and help sustain growth momentum. It also observed that the forthcoming rebasing of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) series in the coming year will have implications for inflation assessment and will require careful interpretation of price trends by policymakers and analysts.

On the external front, the Survey cautioned that slower growth in key trading partners, tariff-induced disruptions to global trade, and volatility in capital flows could intermittently weigh on India's exports and investor sentiment. However, it added that ongoing trade negotiations with the United States are expected to conclude during the year, which could help reduce uncertainty and provide greater clarity on trade relations.

While these external risks are considered manageable, the Survey emphasised the importance of maintaining adequate policy buffers, fiscal discipline, and credibility to navigate potential shocks.

## Retail surge demands smarter oversight in Indian markets

**MUMBAI**

India's capital markets are witnessing a strong surge in retail investor participation, with 235 lakh new demat accounts added during FY26 up to December 2025, according to the Economic Survey 2025-26 tabled in Parliament on Thursday.

The development marks a significant milestone in the country's financial deepening and reflects rising financial awareness and confidence among Indian households.

The Survey noted that this expansion in retail participation has taken place despite persistent global trade uncertainties and ongoing geopolitical tensions that have weighed on financial markets worldwide. Even amid volatile foreign investment flows, India's equity markets displayed measured yet resilient performance during the April–December 2025 period, supported largely by domestic investors.

Benchmark indices recorded healthy gains during the period. The Nifty rose by around 11.1%, while the Sensex gained nearly 10.1%. The Survey attributed this performance to strong domestic investor participation.

## 'Govt's calibrated fiscal strategy anchored growth with stability'

**NEW DELHI**

The government's calibrated fiscal strategy has anchored India's economic growth with stability amid global turbulence, according to the Economic Survey tabled in Parliament on Thursday. It highlights that rising tax collections and focus on capital expenditure has reduced the fiscal deficit and strengthened the country's macroeconomic fundamentals.

The Centre's fiscal deficit is budgeted at 4.4 per cent of GDP in FY26 -- down from 4.8 per cent in the previous financial year. Over the same period, the revenue deficit as a proportion of GDP narrowed steadily, reaching its lowest level of 0.8% in FY26, since FY09, thereby leaving a greater allocation for capital expenditure and reflecting a sustained improvement in the quality of expenditure, the survey states.

The Centre's revenue receipts strengthened from an average of about 8.5% of GDP in FY16–FY20 to 9.2% of GDP in FY25. This improvement was driven by buoyant non-corporate tax collections, which rose from about 2.4% of GDP pre-pandemic to around 3.3% post-pandemic, the survey observes.

The direct tax base expanded steadily, with income tax returns filed increasing from 6.9 crore in FY22 to 9.2% in FY25. Higher return filings reflect improved compliance, greater use of technology in tax administration, and a growing number of individuals entering the tax net as their incomes rise.

Gross GST collections during April–December 2025 stood at Rs 17.4 lakh crore, registering a year-on-year growth of 6.7%. GST revenue growth is broadly aligned with prevailing nominal GDP growth conditions. In parallel, high-frequency indicators suggest robust transaction volumes, with cumulative e-way bill volumes during April-December 2025 growing by 21% (year-on-year).

### WHAT SURVEY UNVEILS?

- India FY27 GDP Growth Est At 6.8% -7.2%; Potential India Growth Est Around 7%
- Global Environment Remains Fragile, India Outlook Remains Positive
- India's External Stability Remains A Significant Strength
- Domestic Demand Continues To Anchor Growth
- Adequate Buffers, Manageable External Position Contained Spillovers From Global Volatility
- Low Inflation, Stable Employment, Higher Purchasing Power Supporting Consumption.

INDIA DIGITAL SUMMIT

## *'KIA aims to frame regulatory sandbox for emerging techs'*

**BENGALURU**




The Karnataka government is working on creating a regulatory framework that allows emerging technologies to be tested and developed in a flexible environment, said Dr Manjula N, Secretary to Government, Department of Electronics, Information Technology, Biotechnology and Science & Technology, Government of Karnataka.

She said such an approach would help innovators carry out research and experimentation while ensuring that long-term governance mechanisms evolve alongside new technologies.

Dr Manjula was speaking at the inauguration of the 20th edition of the India Digital Summit (IDS), held in Bengaluru. The two-day conference, scheduled for January 29–30, is themed "India's AI Moment: Leveraging the Intelligent Economy" and is positioned as the official pre-summit event to the 'AI Impact Summit 2026'.

On policy efforts in the state, she said, "We have a Karnataka Innovation Act (KIA) under which we are trying to frame a regulatory sandbox environment." She explained that this would support various technologies which can have a kind of a freer, you know, more less regulated environment where various technologies can be researched on and developed further."

Speaking on the role of Karnataka in AI adoption, she said, "Karnataka stands up as a cornerstone of India's AI capability. It has structural advantages owing to a good mix of AI talent in the state, government-sponsored centres of excellence, enviable research institutions and an unparalleled startup ecosystem."

She said these factors have helped Karnataka emerge as a key contributor to the country's AI capabilities. "The investments going on are actually creating on-ground competencies which are needed to erect such a national AI architecture," she remarked, adding that initiatives such as accelerator programmes and deep-tech skilling are strengthening talent capacity. "All this will enable the increase in the capacity and the talent depth which will allow industry, academia and government to participate meaningfully in shaping India's sovereign AI future," she added.

## Tesla invests $2 billion in Musk's xAI

**WASHINGTON**

Tesla announced that it will invest $2 billion in xAI, the artificial intelligence company founded by its chief executive officer Elon Musk, while reaffirming that production plans for its much-anticipated Cybercab robotaxi remain on track for later this year.

The announcement comes at a critical time for the electric vehicle maker, as investors closely watch its transition toward advanced artificial intelligence and autonomous mobility.

The investment marks a significant step in Musk's broader vision to pivot Tesla from being primarily an electric vehicle manufacturer into a technology-driven artificial intelligence company. This strategic shift is seen as central to justifying Tesla's market valuation of around $1.5 trillion, which far exceeds that of traditional automakers and is increasingly tied to expectations around AI-driven growth.

# WC: Naqvi's Decision Carries Sporting, Financial Consequences

## Pakistan's looming T20 WC call risks triggering costs far beyond cricketing results

**NEW DELHI**

Pakistan's decision on whether to participate in the T20 World Cup is expected within the next 24 to 72 hours, but the stakes extend far beyond a simple yes or no. With the tournament set to begin on February 7 and the marquee India–Pakistan clash scheduled for February 15 in Colombo, PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi's call could reshape Pakistan's campaign—and its balance sheet.

At its most straightforward, playing the tournament as scheduled offers clarity. Pakistan would avoid legal ambiguities, preserve broadcast and sponsorship commitments, and retain full control over its on-field destiny. While domestic political optics may require careful messaging after recent hardline rhetoric, those challenges remain manageable off-field concerns rather than tournament-disrupting problems.

A middle path—participation accompanied by symbolic protest—offers another option. Such a stance would allow Pakistan to register dissent without undermining its competitive chances. For the ICC and broadcasters, this is the least disruptive scenario, ensuring fixtures remain intact and the tournament avoids dangerous precedents.

More volatile is the idea of boycotting only the India match. On the field, it would amount to surrendering crucial points and increasing net run-rate pressure in a tight group. Off the field, it risks triggering serious legal and commercial consequences. Reports have suggested potential broadcaster claims running into tens of millions of dollars. Even if those figures are debated, the uncertainty alone could unsettle sponsors and future negotiations.

The most extreme option—complete withdrawal—offers decisiveness but at a steep price. The ICC has already shown it will replace teams unwilling to participate, as seen with Bangladesh's removal earlier. For Pakistan, the fallout would include reputational damage, commercial losses and denying players exposure on cricket's biggest stage.

With deadlines closing in, brinkmanship offers diminishing returns. The least damaging route remains clear: play the tournament, keep marquee fixtures intact, and channel dissent without igniting financial or competitive self-harm.

# Pak's WC Boycott Buzz: Iceland Cricket Offers Comic Relief

**NEW DELHI**

**Iceland Cricket hilariously trolled PCB as Pakistan ponder participation in upcoming T20 WC**

Iceland Cricket delivered a dose of humour to the cricketing world by cheekily trolling the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) amid swirling rumours of a potential Pakistan boycott of next month's T20 World Cup. As speculation intensified over Pakistan's participation, the associate nation jokingly offered itself as a replacement, drawing widespread amusement on social media.

Taking to X (formerly Twitter), Iceland Cricket claimed it was "ready to take off" the moment Pakistan decided to pull out of the tournament. To make the joke even more convincing, the board shared a screenshot of supposed travel plans from Keflavik to Colombo, highlighting the logistical chaos a last-minute call-up would entail.

"We really need Pakistan to decide soon upon their participation in the T20 WC. We are ready to take off as soon as they pull out on 2nd Feb, but the flight schedule is a logistical nightmare to get us to Colombo in good time for 7th Feb. Our opening bat is an insomniac!" Iceland Cricket wrote, in a post that quickly went viral.

The humour comes against a serious backdrop. Pakistan is reportedly considering boycotting the T20 World Cup in solidarity with Bangladesh, who were replaced by Scotland after the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) refused to travel to India citing security concerns. Pakistan is the only nation to publicly support Bangladesh's stance so far. A final call on Pakistan's participation is expected following PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi's meeting with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. Naqvi has stated that all options remain open, with a decision likely by Friday or Monday.

Despite the uncertainty, Pakistan has already announced its squad for the 20-team tournament, suggesting preparations are ongoing. While Iceland Cricket's playful intervention is unlikely to materialise into reality, it has once again proven the associate nation's knack for using humour to stay relevant in global cricket conversations—even during moments of geopolitical tension.

*Karnataka must beat Punjab to stay alive after costly slump derails campaign*

# RANJI TROPHY: KARNATAKA FACE MUST-WIN BATTLE

**BENGALURU**

One disastrous outing was enough to undo months of steady progress for Karnataka in the Ranji Trophy. After leading Elite Group B at the halfway stage, the eight-time champions now find themselves in a do-or-die situation heading into their final league match against Punjab.

Karnataka's campaign unravelled following a crushing 217-run defeat to Madhya Pradesh in Alur after the tournament resumed from its white-ball break. That loss saw them slip to third place with 21 points, behind Maharashtra (24) and Madhya Pradesh (22), while Saurashtra (19) also remain in the quarterfinal race. With only two knockout berths available, all four teams are still mathematically in contention.

The equation, however, is straightforward for Karnataka. A victory over bottom-placed Punjab (11) will guarantee them a place in the quarterfinals, irrespective of results elsewhere. Any other outcome will leave them dependent on favourable combinations, provided they secure a crucial first-innings lead.

Karnataka have been bolstered by the return of India internationals KL Rahul and Prasidh Krishna for the high-stakes encounter. Rahul is set to open alongside Mayank Agarwal, while captain Devdutt Padikkal is expected to slot in at No. 4, with KV Aneesh moving to No. 3 after his impressive showing against MP.

"It's important we focus on what's in our control and play our best cricket in all departments," Karnataka coach Yere Goud said. "We don't want to overthink and put ourselves under unnecessary pressure."

Weather could yet play a role, with recent wet conditions in Mullanpur prompting the team management to delay a final call on the bowling combination. With fog and a covered pitch in play, team balance will be key.

For Padikkal, the match represents a stern leadership test. While his batting form has been excellent, guiding Karnataka through this must-win clash could define both his season and captaincy credentials.

# B'desh Shooters Set to Compete in Asian Championships

**NEW DELHI**

Bangladesh will send its shooters to India for next month's Asian Rifle and Pistol Championships, the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) confirmed, days after Dhaka refused to allow its national cricket team to travel for the T20 World Cup citing security concerns.

The shooting championships will be held at the Dr Karni Singh Range in New Delhi from February 2 to 14, with participation from 17 countries and over 300 shooters. The event overlaps with the T20 World Cup, scheduled across venues in India and Sri Lanka from February 7 to March 8, a contrast that had fuelled speculation over whether Bangladesh's shooting contingent would also pull out. However, NRAI secretary Rajiv Bhatia put those doubts to rest. "So far there is no news that the Bangladesh team is not coming. Their team is coming, no doubt about it," Bhatia told PTI, adding that the NRAI has been in regular contact with Bangladesh federation officials.

Bhatia also confirmed that the Ministry of External Affairs has cleared the visit and that the necessary documents have been forwarded to the Indian embassy for visa processing.

# Ashwin Clears Air with Kohli After Social Media 'Indirect Attack' Claim Sparks Buzz

**NEW DELHI**

Ravichandran Ashwin has brushed aside rumours of friction with Virat Kohli after a social media user accused the former India spinner of launching an "indirect attack" on his ex-captain. Ashwin revealed that he personally spoke to Kohli about the episode, turning an online controversy into a moment of camaraderie.

Ashwin and Kohli share a long and decorated history with Indian cricket. Both made their Test debuts in 2011 and went on to form one of India's most successful captain–player partnerships. Under Kohli's leadership, Ashwin flourished as India's premier spinner, rising to become the country's second-highest wicket-taker in Tests. Together, they were central to India's historic Test series win in Australia in 2018, years of home dominance, five consecutive ICC Test mace triumphs and a World Test Championship final appearance.

Despite occasional reports suggesting differences—particularly over Ashwin's limited opportunities in overseas Tests—the two have consistently projected mutual respect. That bond was evident again when Ashwin shared an emotional hug with Kohli during his final days in the Indian dressing room, shortly before announcing his retirement from international cricket. Kohli followed suit months later.

The latest episode began when a fan on X accused Ashwin of indirectly criticising Kohli, triggering predictable fan speculation. Ashwin responded with characteristic clarity and humour, revealing that he had spoken directly to Kohli to clear the air.

"Just spoke to Virat about concern on the indirect attack, and we both had a good laugh about how social media works on such clickbait fan wars. Thanks for giving us a reason to bond and talk," Ashwin posted.

The incident underlined the intensity of online fan culture in Indian cricket, where supporters of star players often clash relentlessly. Rivalries between fan bases—whether involving Kohli, Rohit Sharma, MS Dhoni or even Sachin Tendulkar—continue to fuel debates far removed from the players themselves.

Ashwin's response, however, served as a reminder that behind the noise, long-standing professional relationships often remain intact, grounded in shared memories rather than social media narratives.

# Sarfaraz Khan Eager to Embrace CSK Challenge

**MUMBAI**

**Mumbai batter eyes IPL opportunity with CSK as pathway back to India contention**

Sarfaraz Khan's hunger for runs has never really dimmed, but the timing of his latest surge feels especially significant. Fresh off a commanding double century for Mumbai in the Ranji Trophy, the 27-year-old is now turning his attention to the Indian Premier League, where he will don the yellow of Chennai Super Kings for the first time in his career.

After going unsold for two seasons, Sarfaraz sees his CSK stint not as a burden of expectation but as a long-awaited opportunity to relaunch his white-ball ambitions. "The IPL is very important," Sarfaraz said ahead of Mumbai's Ranji Trophy clash against Delhi. "You get visibility, you play with and against international players, and if you perform, it's noticed."

The Mumbai batter believes the league remains the biggest shop window for players aspiring to break into India's limited-overs squads. With white-ball cricket evolving rapidly, Sarfaraz feels adaptability and consistency are non-negotiable. "White-ball cricket has gone a long way, and IPL gives you that chance," he added.

Sarfaraz admitted that limited opportunities in past tournaments tested his patience, but those experiences have helped him mature. "Hard work never goes to waste," he said. "When I didn't get chances earlier, I kept fighting and trusted that things would fall into place."

Injuries and a long off-season stint at the BCCI's Centre of Excellence also proved mentally demanding. "At the NCA, it's tough. You are alone and you can get frustrated," he said, adding that the phase helped him focus on fitness and address perceived shortcomings.

At CSK, Sarfaraz is keen to soak in the experience, including sharing a dressing room with M.S. Dhoni. "I feel lucky," he said. "I just want to bat freely, work on my power-hitting and enjoy T20 cricket." For Sarfaraz, the formula remains unchanged—runs, patience and perspective, regardless of the format or colour of the jersey.

# Sophie Molineux Takes Over as Australia Women's T20 Captain for India Series

**SYDNEY**

Spin-bowling all-rounder Sophie Molineux was on Thursday named captain of the Australian women's T20 side for next month's series against India, marking the beginning of a leadership transition following Alyssa Healy's impending retirement from international cricket.

Cricket Australia confirmed that Molineux will lead the team in the three-match T20I series, which opens India's multi-format tour of Australia on February 15. Healy, who earlier announced that she would retire after the India series, will continue to captain Australia in the three ODIs and the one-off Test before handing over leadership duties across formats to Molineux.

India's tour begins with T20Is in Sydney on February 15, followed by matches in Canberra on February 19 and Adelaide on February 21. The ODI series will be played on February 24, 27 and March 1, with the opening game at Allan Border Field in Brisbane and the remaining two at the Bellerive Oval in Hobart. The tour will conclude with a one-off Test at the WACA Ground in Perth from March 6 to 9.

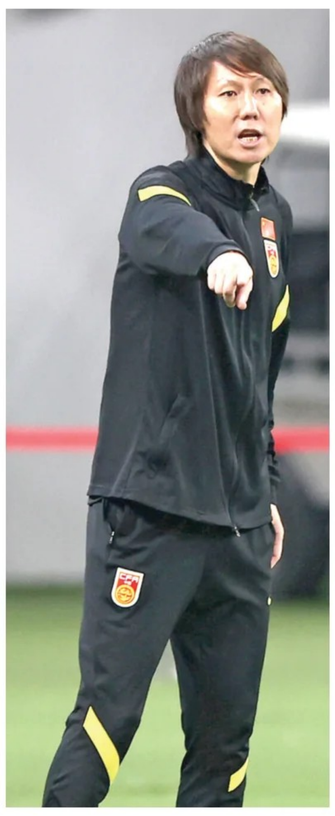
Following the India assignment, Molineux will officially take charge as Australia's all-format captain, starting with a tour of the West Indies in March. Tahlia McGrath has been retained as vice-captain, while Ashleigh Gardner has been appointed co-vice-captain, underlining Australia's emphasis on leadership depth.

Australia's squads, announced on Thursday, also saw the return of Nicola Carey to the white-ball formats, while 19-year-old Lucy Hamilton earned a call-up to the Test side. Phoebe Litchfield was named across formats despite being ruled out of the ongoing Women's Premier League.

At 28, Molineux brings prior leadership experience, having been the youngest captain in the Women's Big Bash League with Melbourne Renegades and later leading Victoria.

# China Hands Out 73 Lifetime Bans in Match-Fixing Crackdown

## Authorities intensify purge as CFA targets players, officials, and elite clubs



**BEIJING**

China's football authorities have imposed lifetime bans on 73 individuals and punished 13 top professional clubs as part of a wide-ranging crackdown on match-fixing, gambling and corruption, the Chinese Football Association (CFA) announced on Thursday.

The sanctions are the latest chapter in a sweeping anti-corruption drive under President Xi Jinping, which has laid bare the deep-rooted problems afflicting Chinese football. Over the past few years, several senior CFA officials have been removed, while dozens of players and coaches have faced disciplinary action for manipulating results and engaging in illegal betting.

Among those handed lifetime bans is former China head coach Li Tie, who guided the national team between 2019 and 2021. A former Everton midfielder, Li is already serving a 20-year prison sentence for bribery following his conviction in December 2024. The CFA confirmed that he is now permanently barred from all football-related activities.

Also included is former CFA chairman Chen Xuyuan, who is serving a life sentence for accepting bribes worth approximately $11 million. In total, the CFA said 73 people were banned for life following a "systematic review" of misconduct cases.

"The punishments are necessary to enforce industry discipline, purify the football environment and maintain fair competition," the CFA said in a statement posted on its official social media account. The association did not disclose details on when the match-fixing incidents occurred or the specific methods involved.

The crackdown has also hit clubs at the highest level of the domestic game. Of the 16 teams that competed in the 2025 Chinese Super League season, 11 will face points deductions and financial penalties when the 2026 campaign begins in March.

Tianjin Jinmen Tiger and last season's runners-up Shanghai Shenhua received the harshest sanctions, with 10-point deductions and fines of one million yuan ($144,000). Defending champions Shanghai Port and Beijing Guoan will each begin the new season with five-point reductions and fines of 400,000 yuan.

The unprecedented measures underscore China's determination to restore credibility to its football system after years of scandal and underperformance.

Gunners make history with eight wins as Arteta rotates freely

# Arsenal complete Champions League clean sweep for top spot

**LONDON**

Arsenal completed a flawless Champions League league phase, becoming the first team to win all eight matches after edging past Kazakhstan's Kairat Almaty 3-2 to secure top spot in the standings. Already assured of a place in the last 16 before kickoff, Mikel Arteta's side also guaranteed home advantage in the second leg of the knockout rounds, provided they continue their march in the competition. The achievement capped a dominant opening phase that underlined Arsenal's growing maturity on the European stage.

"I am very proud of the players and the run that we have had in the first stage of the competition," Arteta said. "It is very difficult to win eight games in a row in the Champions League, and you can see what has happened with other teams."

With qualification wrapped up, Arteta took the opportunity to rotate heavily, making 11 changes from the side that suffered their first home defeat of the season against Manchester United at the weekend. Despite the overhaul, Arsenal rarely looked troubled against tournament debutants Kairat, who finished bottom of the 36-team table with just one point.

The night proved especially significant for Kai Havertz, making his first start in nearly a year after an injury-plagued spell. Within two minutes, the German unlocked the defence with a precise through ball for Viktor Gyokeres, who smashed home his 10th goal of the season. Jorginho briefly levelled from the penalty spot, but Havertz restored Arsenal's lead with a powerful strike from the edge of the area. Havertz also played a key role in Arsenal's third goal, delivering the cross that Gabriel Martinelli converted. Ricardinho netted a consolation deep into stoppage time for Kairat.

Arteta believes Havertz's return to form could be pivotal as Arsenal chase silverware on multiple fronts. "It's going to give him confidence, joy and energy," he said. "He is going to be really important for us in the second part of the season."

With momentum and history on their side, Arsenal now turn their focus to the knockout stages brimming with belief.

*Egyptian star nets in rout as Liverpool finish third, bypass playoff round*

# Salah Returns to Scoresheet as Liverpool Cruise into Champions League Last 16

**LIVERPOOL**

Mohamed Salah marked a significant step in his Liverpool revival by scoring his first goal since early November as the Reds thrashed Qarabag 6-0 in the Champions League to seal direct qualification for the round of 16.

Salah curled in a superb free-kick in the 50th minute to make it 3-0 at Anfield, effectively ending the contest and confirming Liverpool's place among the top eight in the new 36-team league phase. The emphatic win ensured Arne Slot's side finished third overall, sparing them from the uncertainty of the playoff round.

The goal was a timely boost for Salah, whose future at Anfield had been the subject of intense speculation. In December, the Egyptian winger admitted he felt he had been "thrown under the bus" after being left out of three consecutive matches. He then departed for the Africa Cup of Nations with his role under Slot unclear.

Since returning from the tournament in Morocco, however, Salah has started three straight games and now has his first goal since scoring against Aston Villa on November 1. His strike against Qarabag appeared to underline his renewed importance to the side.

Liverpool dominated throughout, with Alexis Mac Allister starring by scoring twice as the hosts overwhelmed their Azerbaijani opponents. The victory also carried a sense of redemption after last season, when Liverpool topped the league phase only to be drawn against Paris Saint-Germain in the last 16 and exit on penalties, with PSG eventually lifting the trophy.

"It's great to be in the top eight again," Mac Allister said. "But then I think back to last season when we finished top and got Paris. It's going to be very difficult, but we've done well to get there." Liverpool will now await one of Club Brugge, Galatasaray, Juventus or Atletico Madrid in the round of 16. With Salah back among the goals, the Reds will hope this European campaign has a different ending.

# I-League 2025-26 Season Set to Kick Off from February 21

**CHENNAI**

After weeks of uncertainty, the All India Football Federation (AIFF) and I-League clubs announced that the 2025-26 I-League season will commence on February 21. The decision follows a comprehensive meeting in New Delhi, where the league's schedule, structure, and governance framework were finalised. The upcoming season will be played in a two-stage format. Stage 1 will see all participating clubs compete in a single-leg home-and-away round-robin, with points accumulated carrying forward into the next stage. In Stage 2, the league will split into two sections: the top-half teams will advance to a championship round contested on a home-and-away basis, while the bottom-half sides will compete in a centralised relegation round. This structure aims to maintain competitiveness throughout the season while offering clear stakes for both promotion and survival. Alongside the scheduling, the AIFF presented a new governance charter for the league. A Governing Council and a Managing Committee are proposed to oversee operations and enforce regulations, with defined roles and responsibilities to be forwarded to the Executive Committee for approval.

# Tillman's Double Fires Leverkusen into Champions League Knockout Stage

**LEVERKUSEN**

United States midfielder Malik Tillman scored twice as Bayer Leverkusen sealed their place in the Champions League knockout phase with a convincing 3-0 victory over Villarreal.

Tillman's brace not only ensured Leverkusen finished inside the top 24 of the expanded 36-team league standings, but also lifted Kasper Hjulmand's side to 16th place — a crucial position that guarantees seeding and home advantage in the second leg of the playoff round.

The 23-year-old opened the scoring in unconventional fashion in the 12th minute. Chasing down Villarreal goalkeeper Arnau Tenas as he attempted to play out from the back, Tillman blocked the clearance inside the six-yard box and watched the ball ricochet into the net. Mostly facing away from goal and struggling to keep his balance, the midfielder showed sharp anticipation rather than finesse.



American midfielder shines as Leverkusen secure seeded playoff spot with commanding win

"In this situation he's very clever," said Leverkusen coach Kasper Hjulmand. "He reads the game very well. Malik's cleverness and intensity are something he's been working on."

Tillman struck again in the 35th minute, this time with more traditional quality, drilling a low right-footed shot from the edge of the penalty area to double Leverkusen's lead. The hosts were firmly in control by then and added a third after the break to complete a dominant performance. Leverkusen began the night 20th in the standings, knowing only a win would guarantee progress to the knockout phase while also keeping alive hopes of a seeded playoff berth. They achieved both objectives with authority, never allowing Villarreal to build momentum.

Hjulmand's side ultimately finished 16th and will now face either Borussia Dortmund or Olympiakos in the two-legged playoff round, scheduled between February 17 and 25.

# Haaland Breaks Goal Drought as Man City Seal Champions League Last-16 Spot

**MANCHESTER**

Erling Haaland ended his long wait for a goal from open play as Manchester City defeated Galatasaray 2-0 to clinch a place in the Champions League last 16, narrowly sneaking into the top eight of the standings.

The Norwegian striker, without an open-play goal in 10 matches, opened the scoring at the Etihad Stadium with a calm finish, lifting the ball over goalkeeper Ugurcan Cakir after being released by Jeremy Doku. Rayan Cherki added the second as City capitalised on favourable results elsewhere to avoid the play-off round.

"With a bit of drama, we did it," said City captain Bernardo Silva. "With the schedule and the amount of injuries we have, having two full weeks to recover and prepare is huge."

City were eager to avoid the play-offs after being eliminated at that stage by Real Madrid last season. A humiliating defeat to Bodo/Glimt a week earlier had left their qualification hopes hanging by a thread, but Guardiola's men responded with a composed performance against the Turkish champions, who will now contest the play-offs.

Norwegian striker scores as City avoid play-offs after tense league phase

Haaland, benched for the first time in the Premier League this season during Saturday's win over Wolves, had previously scored just once since late December, and that from the penalty spot. His assured finish against Galatasaray, however, showed no signs of shaken confidence.

Doku was again instrumental, creating Cherki's low finish into the corner, but his subsequent departure with a suspected hamstring injury was a major concern for Guardiola. "It's a big miss," the City boss said. "Jeremy is such an important player."

Despite fielding an experimental defence and facing striker Victor Osimhen, City were rarely troubled. Elsewhere, defeats and draws involving Real Madrid, Paris Saint-Germain and Newcastle worked in City's favour, sealing progression.

City now await one of Real Madrid, Inter Milan, Benfica or Bodo/Glimt in the last 16, with the possibility of another heavyweight European clash looming in March.

# Susaki, Gulia Propel Haryana Thunders to Top of PWL 2026 League Phase

**NOIDA**

Haryana Thunders ended the Pro Wrestling League (PWL) 2026 league phase on a high, claiming a 6-3 victory over UP Dominators to finish atop the standings with eight points and 29 bout wins from five matches. Captain Yui Susaki and star Anirudh Gulia led the charge, ensuring a commanding performance in Noida.

The tie began in Haryana's favour with a narrow win in the opening bouts. Kajal Dhochack edged past Mansi Lather in the 76kg women's contest on last-point criteria, while Ankush Chandram secured the 57kg men's bout 4–4 on tie-breaker points, doubling the team's advantage.

UP Dominators fought back through Tapsya Gahlawat in the 57kg women's bout, taking control in the Power Minute to win 10–3, and Vishal Kali Raman secured a 9–6 victory in the 65kg men's contest, leveling the tie. The 86kg men's bout went in UP's favour again, with Mykhailov Vasyl edging out Ashirov Ashraf 5–3.

Haryana regained momentum in the marquee 53kg women's bout as Susaki overpowered Antim Panghal 8–3, turning the tie 4–3 with her tactical mastery and turn-and-exposure sequences. Nisha Dahiya's fall against Iryna Koliadenko in the 62kg women's contest further swung momentum decisively for Haryana.

Anirudh Gulia then sealed the match with an authoritative 11–5 win in the heavyweight bout, leaving UP with no chance of recovery. Parvinder concluded the night with a composed 8–5 victory in the 74kg men's category, showcasing excellent control and timely takedowns.

Haryana's blend of Olympic experience, strategic wrestling, and individual brilliance allowed them to finish the league phase undefeated, setting up a strong platform as they advance into the PWL playoffs with top seeding. The Thunders now turn their focus to the knockout stages, aiming to convert league dominance into a championship triumph.

# Prajwal Devaraj Debuts As Producer With Brother's Film MGR

Actor Prajwal Devaraj has stepped into film production by producing a new Kannada film titled MGR. The project is being made jointly by Dynamic Ventures and Purathana Film Productions. The title and first look of the film were unveiled on Wednesday evening to mark the birthday of lead actor Pranam Devaraj.

Veteran actor Devaraj, who attended the event as chief guest, called the occasion a happy and proud moment. He said it took him three decades in cinema before becoming a producer, while his son achieved the milestone much earlier. He praised Pranam's mass look in the poster and said he was pleasantly surprised. Devaraj also appreciated music director Charan Raj and cinematographer Krishna Muttanna for their strong contributions.

Purathana Films executive producer Divya Keshav said she was happy to collaborate with Prajwal on the film. Director Srikanth Hunasuru said this is his second film with Pranam and added that the meaning of MGR will be revealed later. He said the actor will be seen in a fresh style.

Speaking as producer, Prajwal said the story is set in 2005 and revolves around Pranam. He said the team will support new talent and plans to hold the muhurat by March end or Ugadi.

Pranam Devaraj said the film marks a new chapter for him. He said the role will showcase different emotions and that he is preparing hard for a new look and body language. The film has music by Charan Raj and cinematography by Skating Krishna.

# Trikaaram title song goes viral

The Mysore King Yaduveer Wodeyar recently released the making title song of the film 'Trikaaram' and wished the team all the best. The song with the line 'Aa Devara Vamsada Kudi Ivanu, Ee Mannanu Kayalu Bandavanu' has been written by Chethan Kumar James, sung by Shashank Sheshagiri, and Music composed by Vivek Chakravarthy.

The tagline is 'Idu Smashana Alla'. Hosadurga's political leader and drama lover G. Ganesh Murthy has produced it under Sadguru Cine Production and has also portrayed the role of a dangerous villain. Ajjampur's Dilip Kumar.G.R, who worked under many directors, has done this action cut. The title song is meaningful and is the song that comes when the hero explodes in front of his opponents. Currently, it is going viral everywhere and questions are being asked on social media when it will be released on the screen. Since it has an interesting story, the team has not given any hint about the movie so far. Harshavardhan from Bangalore is the hero. Nishvitha Shetty is the heroine. The rest of the cast includes Nagendra Arasu, Balrajwadi, Manju pavgada etc.

Cinematography is by Honnali Yasin, editing by Satish Chandraiah, action by Chandrubande, dance by Height Manju-Kambiraj, lyrics by Dr. V. Nagendra Prasad-Cheetukeshava-Pramod Maravanthe. The shooting has been done for fifty days in the beautiful locations of Chitradurga, Chikkamagaluru, Marikanive, Sanehalli, Davangere, Sira and Mysore. As expected, the team has made a plan to show it to the people this year.

# Katle trailer and song released

The trailer and song release ceremony of the film 'Katle', starring comedian Kempegowda as the lead for the first time, was held at the crowded auditorium of Utsav Legacy. Former Deputy Chief Minister Dr. C.N. Ashwath Narayan, Mandya MLA Ravikumar Gowda (singer), Bigg Boss Pratham, and Cockroach Sudhi inaugurated the program and wished them well. Before this, clips of the artists wishing the team well were aired.

Srividha Abhinandan has written the story, screenplay, dialogues and directed it. It is a new experience for Bharath Gowda a political party activist, social worker and real estate entrepreneur from Hoskote to invest in cinema farming.

Sanmita and Amrutha are the heroines. Harshika Poornacha is also in the lead role. Tennis Krishna, Tabalanani, Harishraj, Ganeshrao Kesarkar, Pawan Kumar, Biradar, M.S. Umesh, Yathiraj, Karisubbu etc. have acted with him. The shooting has been done in Bangalore, Sirsi, Malenadu. Sridhar.V. Sambhram has composed the music for the songs. Anirudh has handled the cinematography, Chuluvamurthy Editing, Action by Ultimate Shiva and Bajrangi Mohan dance.

Speaking later, the director said that the word katle has its own meaning in different regions. Our cinema is called avadi. Every living being has its own time. If it does not happen properly, it stops in the cycle of time.

Kempegowda said, I have acted in more than 75 films in my eighteen-year film career and now I have acted as a hero like a promotion. Although it is horror, thriller, psychological, this is not the film. Everyone likes it like Full Meals. I have appeared in the role of an engineer. The last scenes make the eyes of the audience wet. The lyrics and music are all well done. The media requested that Katle reach everyone. Venkat Gowda of Sachith Films has planned to release it in about 75 centers.

# Proverb inspires movie Title

Since ancient times, proverbs have never been false. Among these, a group of newcomers have used the two words 'Vinasha Kale' from the proverb 'Vinasha Kale' for the title of the film. On Republic Day, the Muhurth ceremony was held in the presence of 'Madduramma Devi and Yallamma Devi' Amman in the industrial center of Rajajinagar. Former president B.M. Harish clapped for the first scene and wished the team well. Bigg Boss contestants Dog Satish, Mallamma, Karibasappa were present on this occasion. Shakti Films is responsible for the production. S. Kirankumar, who hails from Tumkur, has been writing the story, screenplay and action cuts for the film, gaining experience from many directors for the last five years.

The cast includes Pavanisiri, Rishikagowda, Vaishnavi, Srinidhi, Rachana. The magician role played by Shobha, Mandya Siddu as an aghori, Bigg-Boss Mallamma, Pravalika, Disha etc. Five girls have been selected, and the selection process for the remaining boys will be completed soon. The plan is to shoot for thirty days from March in beautiful locations in Bangalore and Chikkamagaluru.

Lyrics and music for three songs are by Manjukavi, cinematography by Vinay Gowda, editing by Jeevan, background music by Vinumanasu, dance by Jaggu-Balu, and publicity design by Devu.

Speaking to the media after the puja, the director said that he has adapted this film into a true story that happened in the life of a departed friend. What disasters can happen if you try to make money in a short period of time and go against the God. At one point, the situation of an Aghori and a magician unfolds, Kiran Kumar.S revealed.

## Mona Singh
### Questions Age Bias, Celebrates Bold Career Choices

Actor Mona Singh says she has never worried about her on-screen age and finds it unfair that women in the film industry are often judged by an expiry date. She points out that male stars continue to play romantic roles even in their sixties, while women face limited opportunities.

Singh is currently enjoying a strong phase in her career with praised performances in shows like Kaala Paani, The Ba**ds of Bollywood*, Made in Heaven 2, and the Netflix series Kohrra 2. She has also appeared in films such as Munjya, Happy Patel, and Border 2.

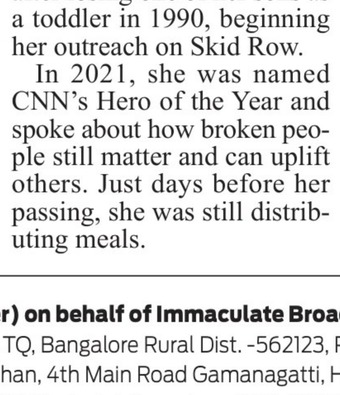
Speaking about Kohrra 2, Singh said she enjoys taking risks and focusing on characters rather than age. She plays Dhanwant Kaur, a police officer leading a murder investigation while dealing with personal loss. She said confidence and self-belief have helped her make bold choices.

The actor rose to fame with the television show Jassi Jaisi Koi Nahi in 2003 and later appeared in the blockbuster film 3 Idiots. Now 44, Singh says she feels settled and creatively satisfied, crediting OTT platforms for offering meaningful roles.

Singh said being part of Kohrra 2 is special as she admires creator Sudip Sharma's work. The second season, set in Punjab, pairs her with Barun Sobti's character in a new case. The series streams on Netflix from February 11. She believes honest storytelling and strong roles matter more than age, and hopes the industry changes its outlook toward women performers across generations and languages worldwide.

# Prabhas Spirit Shoot Planned In 95 Days

Rebel Star Prabhas's upcoming cop action drama Spirit, directed by Sandeep Reddy Vanga, is gearing up for production on a notably tight schedule. Reports suggest the makers plan to wrap up the entire shoot in just 95 days, a rare feat for a large-scale action film. Director Vanga has reportedly designed an extremely detailed plan, with every shooting day, location, and scene charted well in advance. The objective is to ensure speed without sacrificing quality, while maintaining smooth execution throughout production. Prabhas is said to be fully prepared and committed to following the disciplined schedule.Known for his intense storytelling and emotional depth, Vanga is approaching Spirit with sharp focus and precision. Despite the film's scale, the team believes strict planning will help avoid delays and keep the shoot efficient.Adding to the buzz, rumours suggest senior actor Gopichand is in talks to play a key antagonist. Though unconfirmed, the prospect of a Prabhas–Gopichand face-off has thrilled fans. Spirit also stars Triptii Dimri, Vivek Oberoi, and Prakash Raj in pivotal roles.



## Social Media Shirley Raines Dies, Leaves Legacy Of Service

Social media creator and nonprofit founder Shirley Raines, widely known as Ms. Shirley, has passed away at the age of 58, leaving behind a profound legacy of compassion and service. Her organization, Beauty 2 The Streetz, confirmed the news, calling the loss immeasurable.

Raines dedicated her life to serving homeless communities across Los Angeles and Nevada, providing food, essential supplies, emotional support, and dignity. A mother of six, she transformed personal tragedy into purpose after losing one of her sons as a toddler in 1990, beginning her outreach on Skid Row.

In 2021, she was named CNN's Hero of the Year and spoke about how broken people still matter and can uplift others. Just days before her passing, she was still distributing meals.

# Jana Nayagan Censor Delay Grows After CBFC Letter Leak



Actor Thalapathy Vijay's upcoming film Jana Nayagan is facing a delay after a leaked letter from the Central Board of Film Certification raised serious questions about the censor process. The film is directed by H Vinoth and had earlier cleared the Examining Committee stage of certification. According to the leaked letter dated December 22, 2025, the CBFC had granted the film a U/A 16+ certificate with certain cuts. The letter also said the film could be released once the changes were verified and reminded parents to restrict underage viewers. Sources said the makers accepted all the suggested modifications and completed them as instructed by the board. However, an internal objection by a board member later stalled the process, citing concerns over religious harmony. The sudden change placed the film in uncertainty and upset fans, as Jana Nayagan is seen as Vijay's final film before his political entry. Producer K Venkat Narayana first approached the High Court seeking clarity and timely certification. Reports now suggest the producer may withdraw the case and approach the CBFC Revising Committee instead of continuing legal action. The leaked letter has sparked online debate and renewed focus on ongoing tensions between filmmakers and the censor board. With the matter still under judicial review, the release date remains uncertain, leaving audiences and Vijay fans waiting anxiously for official confirmation from authorities and certification officials in the coming weeks ahead amid continued public interest and discussion.

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